

This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

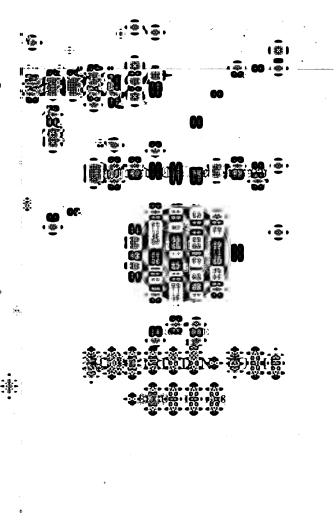
We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + Refrain from automated querying Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

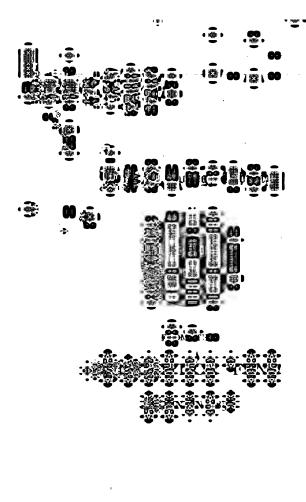
Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at http://books.google.com/





•;•;

• •



•

• •

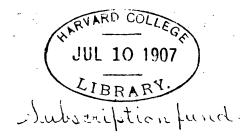
By the same Author

RIVER SONGS
GREEK KALENDS
WILLIAM I, THE CONQUEROR
THE MAID OF ARTEMIS

ARTHUR DILLON

LONDON
ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET
1906

23497.59.15



NOTE

The tragedy is founded on the Romance of Sir Thomas Malory, and on the Verse of Dr. Sebastian Evans.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

ARTHUR, Pendragon, and King of Logris.

MARK, King of Cornwall and all Cambria.

SIR MORDRED, Son to the Queen of Orkney.

SIR GAWAIN,

Half-brothers to Mordred, Princes of Orkney.

SIR GARETH,

SIR LANCELOT DU LAC, Prince of Armorica.

SIR BORS DE GANIS, his Nephew.

SIR LAVAIN, a young Knight.

SIR TRISTAN OF LYONESS.

SIR BEDEVERE THE BUTLER.

SIR LUCAN, his Brother.

SIR URRE OF HUNGARY.

SIR COLGREVANCE LE GORE.

SIR DINADAN.

SIR DAGONET, Arthur's Fool.

SIR ANDRET, Cousin to Mark.

MERLIN.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

GWINEVER, Queen to Arthur.

LA BEALE ISEULT, Queen to Mark.

ISEULT OF THE WHITE HAND, Wife to Tristan.

LA DAMOSEL SAUVAGE, Attendant on Gwinever.

NIMUE, the Lady of the Lake.

MORGAN LA FAY, THE QUEENS OF THE WASTE LANDS

AND OF NORTH GALES, AND THE OTHER LADIES OF

THE LAKE; in all, an hundred and fifty Queens.

KNIGHTS, DAMOSELS and others Attendant.

Place: In certain Kingdoms of the Pendragonship;
Armorica, Cornwall and, chiefly, Logris.

ACT I

SCENE I.—Brocyliand. A Thorn-tree beside the Lake.

(Enter MERLIN and NIMUE.)

NIMUE. Merlin.

MERLIN. Who calleth Merlin? Here am I;

And wearily, in seven-league boots, to boot,

Leaping great salmon leaps, old as I am.

Stay for me. Art thou Nimue?

Nimue.

I am Nimue,

The Lady of the Lake.

MERLIN. Thou who in Gwinever's bower

Goest delicately, O my dotage, better be

An old man's darling than a young man's slave.

Woo I with both feet in the grave?

The snow-fall of my beard I'll shave, And shear the ragged brow I have, Out of offending.

NIMUE.

I, whilom,

Gave to Arthur cradle and home
Beside the shore of my blue mere.
Hand in hand, year after year,
Boyhood and girlhood, at unawares,
Margause and Arthur grew together
Under the change of fairy weather,
Among the conies and the hares.
Black peat was under-foot.

MERLIN.

No doubt.

NIMUE. Deep enough to stable man and beast.

MERLIN. I'll twist a rope of sand will draw them out.

NIMUE. Queen Mab's faery priest, Thou brewedst love-philters for Arthur, I wis, And Margause, whose blood was too nigh his By natural and holy law.

Merlin. Fie!

What skills it? Give me thy love.

NIMUE. Not I.

Or—sith thou art importunate— Make me arbitress of Arthur's fate;

Thy power in my power put in trust. MERLIN. Nimue, what must be must.

NIMUE. Best get thee from me.

MERLIN.

Nay, love me at last;

Thy love, or nought. I will make dance

Dead kings to do thee reverence;

The storied past

Shall rise in Camelot, by my spells,

For ever young; men shall be rich,

Even at thy nod; and thou a witch

Envied to death by other witcheries.

NIMUR. Canst foil Mordred's treason? MERLIN. That can I.

NIMUE. Canst found

King Arthur and his Table Round, To everlasting?

MERLIN. And will. But wilt thou love me?

NIMUE. First teach to me

A spell of mickle grammarie,

To trammel, as in cobweb fine.

Thy five senses, every one,

In drunkenness of blood-red wine

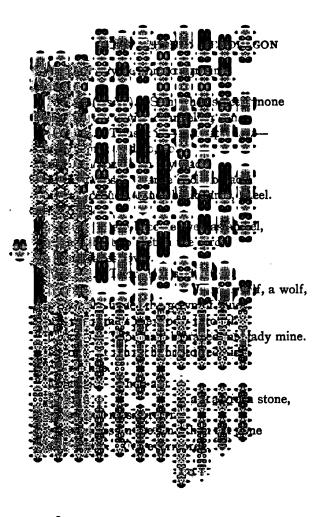
Hoodwinked, beyond roving bound.

Trust me, or lack me.

MERLIN.

Be it done,

*



•

Shut in a thorn-tree's knotty core, Dream all this, Merlin.

MERLIN.

I do.

NIMUE.

Fool, fool art thou,

Coffined in a blackthorn bough!

MERLIN. Impounded upright, I feel the bark

Stiffen upon me, a timber sark,

A jerkin. Leavest thou me?

NIMUE.

I will.

Waste thy voice, and waste thy skill.

Slave of folly, though so wily,

Thou shalt nevermore be heard,

Seen, nor wondered at, nor feared;

Swallowed in this forest rude

With boulders up and down it strewed,

And torrents roaring nigh at hand,

Here in waste Brocyliand.

MERLIN. I creak in the wind; I blossom in Spring;

In my branches the birds sing.

All winter I go bare;

A blackthorn I, in biting air.

Green leaves are my finger-nails,

Upon the twigs.

(He is encompassed about in the tree.)

NIMUE. Thou art spellbound.

No barrow, with gold underground

And overhanging stones stood round,

Memorize thee! Morgan la Fay,

Queens, of the Waste Lands and North Gales,

Ladies of Avillon!

(The Ladies of the Lake enter as called.)

ALL THE LADIES OF THE LAKE. What time o'day? Bell-horses, bell-horses, off and away!

NIMUE. Where weasel and stoat are hanged in a row,

And kite and jay swing high, swing low, Fee, fie, foh, fum!
Come, ye merry, wild witches, come;
Dance our dance till cock-crow.

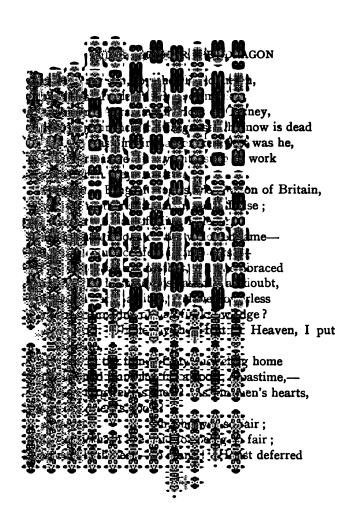
(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE II.—CAMBLOT. BEFORE THE GREAT HALL.

(Enter Arthur, Mordred, Gawain and Agravain.)

ARTHUR. Merlin, that wizard who engendered these

Belfries by night, and bade our gables, windowed With window-panes of almondine, arise At dawn even as the sun, whose wisdom mocked The search of our foes, Merlin is lost; erased Out of life's bold charactery, wholly By such an error as on his own head Plucks his own spells, that the enchanter sleeps, Enchanted in enchantment; the last Quest, The Quest of the Holy Grail, from Camelot Steals away knights who made us noteworthy, while Secular forethought, lodged on Merlin's brow, Proves but a fool in years. Is this a time, Other griefs gnawing me, which I confess I feel but name not,—is this a choice hour,



Thy cause, say, to Sir Lancelot of the Lake,
There was an umpire, there was consummate truth,
There was a senator sealed to our heart,
Our hearth, our health, under an adamant
Signet, above suspicion innocent
Of paltering 'twixt honour and cowardice;
Ruled by whose ordinance, thy quarrel had
Assumed proportion.

Allowed Sir Lancelot stop GAWAIN. Scarce this side superhuman, paragon man, Through an achievement past ambition, In those twelve battles with the Picts and Scots, Which, by a charter of most obstinate fighting, Gave unto thee Logris. Could word of wight, In such a passage as here reeks of scandal, Be mediatory among us, could a phrase Compound such jars, 'twere his where culminate, In lion-like and formidable bulk, The ideas of force and faith. But I cannot A senior judgment bow before, as touching What I should do. In my proceedings here. I was but rash as my occasion, where I mote not be less dreadful.

AGRAVAIN. In the King's lips Sir Lancelot is, questionless as heaven,

In truth's exalted niche; there may he stick, Since honour is to Lancelot of the Lake The plinth and basis which he stands upon. Yet, let repute enthrone him as she doth, Our quarrel is our own.

ARTHUR. What is begun,
Begins, not finishes. Margause shall lie,
According with her nearness to our blood,
With Queens of Logris; while King Pelenor's tomb
Shall open to receive his murdered son.
Alas, alas, alas, for Queen Margause,
Dearly and pearly leved! Go order well

Dearly and nearly loved! Go, order well These funerals. The Ladies of the Lake!

(Enter, with the dead body of Margause, Nimue, Morgan La Fay and all the other Ladies of the Lake.)

A hundred and fifty Queens! They bend not the herb

In pacing over it; brush not a seed
From the Autumn grasses. These are sprites that
walk

And wake, when one of my House passeth away.

NIMUE. We are the bulrush and the sedge
Sighing at the water edge,
Along meandering banks.

A bevy of us, we move in ranks

After the Queen Margause who lieth so chilly,
Stilly as water-lily.

(Exeunt, with the dead body, all the QUEENS.)
ARTHUR. They are blown away.

AGRAVAIN. The legend we'll cut deep, In oghams indelible, of this man The just end.

GAWAIN. And hers. She—though her son, I say it— Were answerable at the stake for unchastity, By the law of Orkney's Isle, being alive.

ARTHUR. Put that from mind. See these entombments both

Suitably undistinguished, neither marked
By over little nor yet over much
Of following; which, more than our neglect,
Will, in men's minds, give them the obscurity
Of snow-flakes fallen on water; for this princess
Is reminiscent of things past recall
I most fain curtained up; generally, too,
I will no commentary upon lives
Foreign to praise. Go.
(Exeunt Gawain and Agravain following the
Dead.)

Mordred, 'tis a sick world,

And I lie sick in it. The knight that's dead, Ye slew him foully, nursing your intent In ambush; all of Orkney upon one—Save Gareth only, to his glory, hung back—I hear, ye slew him. So beset in front, He chid you all. But thou, Sir Mordred, cam'st A thief, a thief behind and, twixt his plates, Gav'st him thy dagger's grace.

MORDRED. Dost blow on me?

I slew him like a caitiff miscreant,
The surest way the best. And, in this Presence,
I make my avouch, had I been by in time,
He then unarmed, I would have struck him
dead

On Orkney's royal pillow. Furthermore
This was the execution that I did,
Which thou dost know in part, but hear in full.
On the discovery, when colourless
Her burly paramour fled, I seized Margause
By the unbraided locks which wantonly
She wore about her shoulders; and, King Arthur,
Deaf to her prayers for mercy, then and there,
I brake her skull for it, dashing her to death
Against the floor.

ARTHUR. Wrathful and hateful man,

She bare thee, and thou slewest her.

MORDRED.

Unto shame

She bare me. Am I, by my proper deed,

Bastardized, or was it by hers and thine?

I'll answer thee. Take toll of it. It was

Her scarlet shame to love Sir Lamorake;
Her thousandfold more shame to wed King Lot;
And her most spotted and polluted shame,
When thou, my father, with dishonouring

Of holy honour—

ARTHUR. Mordred, Mordred, I must needs forgive Thy bitter spirit.

MORDRED. Thou hast damned me unto hell; For I must break that law which bids us honour Father and mother.

ARTHUR. My son, my son.

MORDRED.

'Tis brave,

My genealogy.

ARTHUR. Have patience.

Be not a male fury. I am childless, Except where sonship is not worshipful, As thou enforcest; and the strict entail In Mordred must I plant, and hope to grow.

MORDRED. Will the estates endure me, that I reign?

ARTHUR. When I am with my fathers. But that I,

Who founded the High Order of the Round Table
Sworn to redress wrong, whose gentle compeers
Should expurgate abuse—
Oh, irony! that I should leave the world
Worse for my private course that, with a leer,
Eyes the edifice of my public aim; and sets
Firebrands to it.

MORDRED. Gird at me no more. Add nothing unto this, that all are foul, From top to bottom of the court, my Liege. (Exit.)

ARTHUR. From base to summit. Not only I once mingled

My crescent youth with hers who hath become King Lot of Orkney's; but—be there not moods In which I know I have nor friend nor wife? Sir Lancelot of the Lake, Queen Gwinever, Mine own espoused Gwinever, Gwinever,—I'll not believe it. Nay, she is too proud, Too pure, too loving! never have I met The quailing nor the fear, in her gaze; no look, No thought other than she is. For Lancelot, Had he been less loyal than he is strong,—

My ornament, my garland, buttress, all,—
He could have won her when I lay in the lists,
Otherthrown by his tilt-spear, time and again,
The realm applauding their bridal day. Yet,
Nothing as wronging them, only allowed
As testing mine own conscience, say I know
The twain are guilty, how can I condemn—
I, by the side of whose transcendent lust
Theirs were a gambol and a slip recovered
Almost before they fell? My fancies reel
Grossly with that orgy of my youth. I have
wallowed.

My foulness taints their cleanness. I believe One woman rests to me crystalline pure, A housewife all angelic; and one man, Monastically chaste, is my firm friend. Would that I were worthier.

(Bell begins.)

The great bell

Tolls for Margause.

(Enter DAGONET.)

DAGONET.

My Lord King.

ARTHUR.

Dagonet.

DAGONET. "Sir Dagonet," your Grace. Thy fool is knight,

As thy knights are fools.

ARTHUR. I am the chief of them. To be rid of which folly that breaks the back Of manhood,—at all events, to unlade Some part of my share,—I will penetrate Cathedral forests that, like eyelids, close Day out; till I touch and adore the ground Where the rubeous vessel of the Eucharist Mystically hath rejoiced some sundry knights Gathered in Sarras, or at Corbin beyond Brocyliand.

DAGONET. Wilt to the city of Corbin

Beyond Brocyliand?

ARTHUR. Thither, gentle fool.

DAGONET. Folly is of gentle blood then; gentle fool.

ARTHUR. Gentle, and simple. I will hear mass in Sarras.

DAGONET. But let that be as it may,—which brings me out,

And puts me off my tale,—there is from the West,
With presents to spice his words withal, the cousin
Of King Mark. Would he brought us posturemasters

Which were for my complexion more than thine,

While Queen Margause is knolled home. Here is Sir Bedevere,

Thy oldest knight. Pray heaven he be thy last; Save thou canst make them better than their wives.

(Enter Bedevere.)

ARTHUR. Our wives are too good for us; is it so? Rise, rise, Sir Bedevere the Butler.

Bedevere Missions

And gifts of greeting come from Cornwall, sire, From King Mark.

DAGONET. Thou but speakest after me, To glean credit cheaply, Sir Maggotpie; Thou pickest up my words, and sell'st them as thine.

BEDEVERE. Peace, before the King.

ARTHUR. We will deal in this out of hand; Then distance distances of remote place. Daybreak, Evensong sees our pilgrimage. Margause! (Aside) Gwinever, Gwinever!

(Exit, with Bedevere.)

DAGONET. Oho, so so? There are men so queasy, that if they exceed over night, they will wear sour faces next morning. I will sup with such, but I will not breakfast with them. For with King Arthur the mischief is that he is not man enough to sin and sleep well upon it.

(Enter Tristan and LA Beale Iseult.)
Tristan. Give me good wishes, Dagonet. This,
Love,

Is the King's jester. Other men I have known Make sport of things; but this is mirth itself.

DAGONET. Lady mine, since I know nothing of thee,

Thou art of good repute; for I know no good Of any one.

TRISTAN. Thou shalt live and learn. Iseult, Shake we the dust of travel off. Be free As air, as fancy, gamesome as desire; We stand in Camelot, of British Logris The royal capital, where, on each bank Of Usk, a chapel pendant on the bridge, Her booths are alive with rare artificers. We have climbed forestreet, mounting many steps, To the hall of the Round Table.

ISEULT. We forlorn pair
Of pilgrims taken in the trellis-work
And tangles of most captivating love,
Outcast, and outlaws of my husband's lands,
Will not King Arthur redeem us? To my sorrow
I am King Mark of Cornwall's bounden spouse;
And thou, Sir Tristan of Lyoness, art

My lordly bond of love.

DAGONET. Damosel-errant,
Folk keep thee in countenance here. But, verily,
Love-sickness hath for antidote only
Marriage alone, but that infallible,
Yet worse than the disease; that cuts off the head
To stay the toothache; that, being tried once,
Is once too oft, and leaves the patient liable
To later fancies quite incurable.
So that 'twere wiser let the fever burn
Itself out.

ISEULT. Thou hast eaten of sour grapes.

DAGONET. I have drunk wine at the Round Table,
Lady.

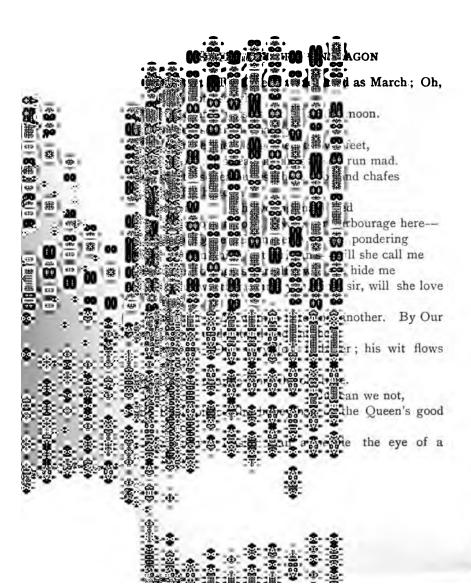
TRISTAN. Vinegar! Thou hast imbibed vinegar! But tell me of Sir Lancelot, where he is, For thy firstfruits of greeting.

DAGONET. I did ill,

Directing you unto Sir Lancelot

Who, all know, doeth ill, and the Queen too.

TRISTAN. They do not well that say he doeth ill; He thwacked the pagan and makes Arthur big. But hath the Queen received him back to grace, After his wreathing round his helm the sleeve And token of the Maid of Astolat?



TRISTAN. He is a madcap.

ISEULT. Or a weather-cock

That shews where the wind sits.

DAGONET. I must tell you,

First, make friends with Sir Knight, no stickler he—Folk live with folk here, angels live with angels—

He's not censorious, full of rebuke

Nor comic fustian. The King's government

Is given in fee unto Queen Gwinever;

And the fee-simple of the Queen is given

Unto Sir Lancelot.

TRISTAN.

As thou to me.

They twain will rule our dear acceptance well,

Being two lovers in like case themselves;

As the great blazon of their privy joy

Is chanted in all ears, except the King's

Who, for he doteth, keeps his eyes waxed fast-

DAGONET. Accusing eyesight for credulity-

TRISTAN. And bids smooth falsehood cloak the rugged truth—

DAGONET. Fearing, as some say, to accuse himself

Who hath not always served cold continence.

TRISTAN. Such as we are his beneficiaries—

DAGONET. Who profit by his blinking gentleness-

TRISTAN. That grows proverbial.

ISEULT. Yet, these days of blood,
Of vengeance bitter for wrong-doing sweet!
The bell tolls for the son of Pelenor,
With Margause, Queen of Orkney, done to death,
His lady-love; so heard we. I foredread.

TRISTAN. Then, shall we back to Cornwell to

TRISTAN. Then shall we back to Cornwall, to King Mark?

ISEULT. Not to King Mark.

TRISTAN. To Erin, to thy sire?

ISEULT. To none but Lancelot's Queen Gwinever.

She knows to love.

DAGONET. She hath a facility to it.
Fie! Seek not garbage under lily-flowers.
Surmise not evil—lest you find it out.
Or,—if you find it,—look the other way.
Your easy vision sees the obvious;
But needs that eyesight were superlative
That spied the little goodness of the world
Amongst its vast of evil. To see grace
Had need of hawk's eyes. Blessed are the fools
Who look and see nothing but what they wish.
Employ yourselves toward my Lady Gwinever,
Is my counsel of well-wishing. Follow it.
Here keep they High Court of Love's Equity.

TRISTAN. Lo, in a troop come Lancelot and the Queen.

That is Sir Bors de Ganis of Lancelot's kin; And that la Damosel Sauvage with the Queen.

DAGONET. Your pardon if I tarry not. I run First into danger to them. I kiss my hand. Follow me, within the century.

(Exit. Bell ceases.)

TRISTAN. Prosper, quaint knight. ISEULT. This then is she whose pattern is our excuse.

She is full of joy; endearment is in her eye.

TRISTAN. Enter we into her sunshine.

ISEULT.

Mark her cheer;

Catch the good moment.

(They stand aside. Re-enter DAGONET, leading GWINEVER by the hand, who hath LANCELOT by the other; with them Bors, LA DAMOSEL SAUVAGE, and other KNIGHTS and DAMOSELS.)

GWINEVER. That went merrily!

Let us a-maying. Fool, to thy duty, Sir.

DAGONET. I will always forget my duty, recognizing it

As a poor cousin.

GWINEVER.

Prithee, I mean, entrap

My lord Sir Lancelot in jollity. He thinks on these untimely deaths, I'll lay My life to nothing. Build not prison-houses With sad realities for building-stones. Let amaranthine buds open under my feet Miraculously, whithersoever I go; Truth is not beautiful enough for me. We can make no man live by mourning him; But kill ourselves unless we laugh and smile Of mornings. Lancelot, thou art silent. Believe me.

LANCELOT.

I am thy temple, and I worship in it.

TRISTAN (Advancing with ISEULT). Gracious Sir Lancelot.

GWINEVER. Sir Tristan of Lyoness?

LANCELOT. None other, and my friend.

We twain have held it hardily, whilom Together in the tilt-yard.

Not equally; TRISTAN.

Nor to extremity; else, I confess,

I met not Lancelot a second time.

LANCELOT. Yes, equally and matched. Never believe it; TRISTAN.

Or the first trial of our relative weight,

Prowess, breath, skill and stoutness in the lists

Had proved my lasting, last confusion.
My lord forbare me ere he wrought my shame;
And gave me noble meeting. Beseech you, share
My welcome with this damosel, this Queen,
La Beale Iseult, daughter of Erin's King,
And Lady of Cornwall.

GWINEVER. Ye are our swallows here, And shall make Summer hasten. Will ye rest? Your hands shall be free of my wealth, pardy!

ISEULT. Dear Lady Gwinever, pity and ruth Are more to me than gold or precious pearl Brought from the bottom of the sea or mine.

Gwinever. But surely thou art dowered with happiness?

Thou art beautiful.

ISEULT. Is to be beautiful to be happy, Queen? Art thou supreme, unclouded, full of joy? For that must follow.

GWINEVER. I am queen of my desires; Queen of my time, my beauty and my fame; Of tears for pity and of smiles for mirth. Unfold what music's in thee.

ISEULT. Hear, again,
The tragedy of woman. I, in marriage,
Was promised, and, from my mother's portals, given

To Royal Cornwall. Tristan, King Mark's chief knight,

Fetched me out of my father's court. I saw him, Mistook him for my lord to be, mistook My duty in my love; we pledged each other In loving cups upon the dancing boat That brought me from Ierne; and, ashore, My joy became my sorrow.

TRISTAN. Call us not hard names. Dear Queen; she was not easily deceived, Nor wanton in her wishes, that we fell To this state where we are. Her mother, Madam, A mistress of strange potions, distilled Nectar of herbal essences which, sipt, Conjure desire, irrevocable yearning For her or him first seen after the draught; Which, as the intention purposed, should have hapt To be her husband. But how fell this out? Which truly think of, ere you judge our fault. Thirsting upon the voyage, from the vial We drew the sealed stopper forth, for wine Which we suspected not; and so quaffed off A goblet brimmed of it, wherein we pledged Each other, seeing and loving in a breath; Or else the mystery of man and woman

Were magical enough.

ISEULT. Loathing King Mark,
Leaving my kingdom's throne, hither I flee;
Queen's and King's daughter, and her noble knight,
Both at thy feet fall down, and only cry.

Chapter of the cry of it. Lancelo

GWINEVER. Oh, bitter is the cry of it. Lancelot, if so

King Mark be, as we know he is, a monster
In kind, that were extenuation;
That were some ground, valid, I am sure of it.
If Tristan be sweet as the sweetest who
Ever yet made wife sin, we must suppose
The Recording Angel hath set all that down
Against the utter debt. Hide in these arms;
We are your city of refuge, children; creep
Under our mantle, out of danger. We will
Forestall your prayers with giving. Wish for a
thing

And, in the wishing, have it.

Lancelot. It is my right, Ye accept of my castle of Joyous-Gard. Nephew, have it in charge to make my house So much forget its master, as to think My guests the freeholders of it; they are Mistress and master at fullest. Noble knight,

How brake ye out of Cornwall hither?

TRISTAN. With some fighting,

And a long flight.

GWINEVER. Put off your travelling cloaks:; Anoint your eyes with rest—oil after toil, In my lord's castle Joyous-Gard.

Tristan. Evermore thanks.

GWINEVER. Prithee, Sir Bors de Ganis, Whose gentleness and nobleness are matched To one another; and thou, Damosel Sauvage, Hie you busily.

Damosel Sauvage. Cornwall's Queen, I lead. Never no Damosel nor Knight, but finds Sir Lancelot favouring.

ISEULT. Our thanks built up and crowned. DAGONET. If thy conscience offend thee, pluck it out.

A hand to each. Sail, whither folly leads you.

(Exit DAGONET between Tristan and Iseult, with Bors, LA DAMOSEL SAUVAGE, other KNIGHTS and DAMOSELS attendant.)

GWINEVER. Oh, what a poison's here! How stand our names?

Adultery flees to us for harbour.

LANCELOT. Cornwall

Sends hither what he cannot keep at home, His errant mistress; and, with us in Logris, Margause and Lamorake were rotten boughs Bearing most golden-seeming fruit.

GWINEVER. The lees
Of what with such a thirst we quaffed sicken
The drenched heart. I see it, Sir Lancelot,
In thy regard. Nay, but thou dost abhor
Me, thou hast left a ruin.

LANCELOT. Gwinever, Ruined we are together; never say That either ruined other. Our twin orbs Are as two suns that set in fire together. GWINEVER. Yet thou dost loathe me. Noblest Queen on earth, LANCELOT. When I was questing for that Royal Blood Shed for us all, a hermit castigated My cleaving sin; and I made shrift in truth, Baring my soul to his seraphic ken, And made confession that, tide heaven, tide hell, In that whole love I cherish toward thee, Queen, Are fair repute, worship, all deeds well done, All kind, all humble, all exalted thoughts That make for honour. And I dare to keep My awful passion with its consequence,

Privilege and duty.

GWINEVER. Thou art dutiful, I know; And privileged, thou knowest. But, by our Faith, Thou art not what thou wast.

Lancelot. Thou canst trouble me; Brand me betwixt the eyes, and cross my forehead To vexed lunacy.

GWINEVER. I am not jealous, now. Time was for such comedies. In thy fit,
Thou rangedst from me, when I was displeased;
And worest a stranger emblem on thine helm,
To mad me,—or disguise thyself, thou saidst,
As thinking none supposed Sir Lancelot
Would wreathe favour of lady, none but mine,
Round his tilting-casque.

LANCELOT. Taunt me not, dearest Queen.
GWINEVER. That day, thy kin,
Banded against thee without note of thee,
Fell on thee in the tournament together,
And gored thee in the side which I had washed
With all the balm of Gilead, given my sceptre
To salve and close. Yet thou went'st to another,
Elain of Astolat, to chaste Elain.
I could have tickled her to death with straws,
Pricked her to madness, made her, day on day,

Feel my knife with the blue veins of her throat How sharp it was. But she is dead. And thou That mockedst with unmanly fealty, True to me, false to her, nay, false to both, To all of us, to everything in earth And heaven—nay, she died for thee of bare grief, Elain of Astolat; Elain of Astolat; And I will do the same. Thou tirest of me; And cheat'st me with a hollow service; mere Mockery to my starved longing.

Lancelot. Heavenly Queen,
Heaven be my witness, I would lay my head
Betwixt the block and axe, leaving my poll
To brave the four winds on the bar of the bridge,
Even for thy lightest willing.

GWINEVER. Mock me still!

Still shewing but not feeling that strong fervour
That wears not weak in me. Am I so old?

Domy lips wither? Doth my hair drop off?

Were I a beldame crone such as the ape,

With wrinkled visage, simulates, I trow
My bosom lacked not fuel to keep up
Desire yet hungry. In my after-glow,
Passion's a smelting furnace; girlhood was
A truant filly, but womanhood a steed

Stretched to the gallop, that, with nostrils wide, Snaps tendons and wins all.

Lancelot. Why speak'st thou thus?

Let me not boast of shame; thou art my witness I ran mad for thy love. And how I lived Remember not; unless that, in my sark,

Under the hedgerows and on heaths, I fed On cress and acorns. Goatherds I mistook

For Pictish gods; and they were very kind

To me whose frenzy had slain them.

GWINEVER. Get thee to it Again, for me! Prince of Armorica,

Would that King Arthur served me up thy heart Spiced in a chalice; yea, or finely minced And parched with the fire! I would eat, fasting, That precious food, thereafter famishing, Abstinent from all baser. Get thee gone, Get thee gone, recreant! "Get thee gone" cracks Ten thousand hearts in one.

Lancelot. Why "get thee gone," then? Can there nought better come of truth and faith? Oh, virtue gone astray, in our rebuke Be monumental! But we are indistinct clouds Once met; we have no disseverance.

GWINEVER. Repeat that word?

For even there is cordial I'll distil Out of the poisonous alembic. Arthur Makes vain assay at an immaculate court Beyond our human kind. Go not thou hence; King Arthur goeth hence, and camps afield, With a long retinue, on pilgrimage For which we cross ourselves; lies hence to-night. Within the empty chambers, so many knights Drawn from our precincts, by the pious call, And from the purlieu of our palace, Sir, Doth it not quicken thee? Hast thou no pulse Time was thy wit was yare. No prying stabs The dark fold of the silent cloak of night. With too intrusive eyes. O Lancelot, We have stept far and safely; let us dare This last adventure, although never again We shew to envy and suspicion The beacon they would sail by. For I know Much more is guessed than said, more thought and known

Than we hear whispered.

Lancelot. That we fear to speak of Is as an inward, undiscovered sickness
To the whole realm of Logris where thou reign'st;
And, next to Arthur's sin, our sin explores

And charts the passage for in-coming death.

For sin, believe 't, is death. Let us be honest;

Our tender, glorious affection

That doth elate us as with holiness

And immortality, let us confess,

Is hell, is death, destruction and the tomb,

With fiery waking after awful dreams;

No better. Kiss me. We will sin and die;

Sin while we live; and die for evermore.

GWINEVER. Ay, such a sin is to be braved and won As a strong battle. I will send thee word, Quoting each detail of thy privy coming And safe return. Mine eyes brim.

LANCELOT.

Be thou bold.

GWINEVER. Our royal husband moves his presence hither.

We are not green nor inexperienced; The invisible tumult of a whirlpool be The figure of our method; we will gloss Our faces over, hiding what's below.

(Re-enter Arthur, with Andret and the Cornish Knights, Mordred, Gawain, Agravain, Gareth and other Knights, attended.)

ARTHUR. My Queen, my knight of knights, and nephews both

Returned after the interment, here is a tale Comes from the West. But ye shall hear it told, Ere we put foot in stirrup, as our intent Is to ride forth. Sir Andret, say'st thou so? What, a wronged husband, and a fellow-king, Cornwall prays justice of us?

Andret. Cornwall claims
The handing over of these guilty souls
Escaped and, as he thinks, ensconced here.
He moves by me his spokesman.

GWINEVER. Cornwall claims?

What is the fair style of this gentleman?

GAWAIN. Sir Andret.

GWINEVER. Sir Andret, shall we find and bind, At King Mark's bidding?

ARTHUR. This likes us wondrous ill.

Sir Tristan of Lyoness is my choice knight. Be Queen la Beale Iseult his mistress held After this carnal sort, we know not; but Yield her not up to pre-determined death. Bid Mark rule his own realm.

ANDRET. Then hear King Mark
The counsel that he gives thee, Christian King;
The seventh canon of the Decalogue
Blot from the Bible. To adulterate license

Thy court is sanctuary, and a sink Where lewdness runs to waste.

LANCELOT. Oh, villainy!

MORDRED (Aside). In Albion, view the world.

LANCELOT. Did Arthur, against all the earth, win Logris,

And will ye not speak fair?

ARTHUR. Mark raves. Hear us,
Ambassador. Cornwall is full of words.
We must believe the madness of his wrongs
Forgets his kinglier station. But advise
Thy liege Lord that we wrong him not at all;
Nor yet wrong those that wrong him. Bid him set
Padlocks on his tongue, and keep his words within
doors

When they are dangerous.

GWINEVER. Can this bearding pass? Shall not the heathen that afflict our shores Make merry with our valour when they hear The jest and lay made of this ambassage, How it was answered?

GAWAIN. Let the Round Table speak.

ARTHUR. I will not war upon King Mark for this;

And cannot chide him. Let him eat his words,

And we forget them. All's said that's to say.

Andret. Then we have said.

(Exit with Cornish Knights.)

ARTHUR (Aside). Oh, what a stab is truth! Our court is foul:

And our court is my home!

AGRAVAIN (To GAWAIN). It's plain to see, we who have not clean hands

Must hide them cowardly.

GWINEVER.

What might Mark do,

If we should grant the extradition

Of these runaways?

ARTHUR. Might? Nay, he would and must Doom Queen Iseult unto the iron stake
And blazing faggots; for it is the law
Equable upon queen and peasant. Judge,
King, husband, all in one! What can be said
Of that false knighthood that seduces queens
To such a shameful danger?

GWINEVER. The dignity

And the redemption of female passion

Is, if we fall—shame on us if we fall!—

We suffer most in it. But can no pity

Pierce the heart o' the storm that in flaming levin wraps

A woman's perfidy; must the limbs burn That lightly are so lost?

ARTHUR. They must burn up;
Or else the dust and ashes of the dead
Doomed in this sort cry out. We cannot mend,
Nor would we break the law. But the seducer,
In Cornwall, Logris or societies
Of all our nations, is exposed to die
By the first hand that takes him.

GWINEVER. Art so hard?

ARTHUR.

I am so just.

GWINEVER.

Say, I desired

The life of one poor woman I held dear, Who had proved frail.

ARTHUR. Thou'dst not desire it, Queen, Beyond the law. Strengthen such as do stand. But either must monarchs forego the office, Or do the office. I am moved with this. Pray, with a thousand, thousand, thousand prayers, That in our reign be execution done On none of these fair creatures.

GWINEVER. Good Lord, deliver us.

ARTHUR. When we are home, back through Brocyliand

From Corbin come, which shall not be too long,

We shall hold Pentecostal tournament, In the meads here by Camelot; when Tristan, Come so suddenly as I hear, shall hold Our side, with thee, Sir Lancelot.

Lancelot. I am lief to strive
With King Baudemagus and with the King
Of the Hundred Knights, and Galahaut the Haut
Prince.

Who, I hear, mean to come in against us, Upon the feast of Pentecost.

Arthur.

Heaven grant

Our Round Table shall become broad as the world! We will keep Pentecost, tell the Knight of Lyoness. Our travel now journeyeth past the mere Where Merlin met me first, where, overwhelmed In waters, Nimue fostered, Lancelot, thee. My knight peerless, troth, I shall miss thee much Upon the road. But company is untaxed Where friendship rules in all things.

GARETH. This pilgrimage, shall you, my Lord, not ride on't?

Lancelot. No, young Sir Gareth. After many years,

I saw the light about the chalice, not Aramathy's cup itself. Yet have good hope

To do better than I.

GARETH. Well, I shall, perhaps. Sir Lancelot of the Lake, I love thee more Than I love all my brethren, Orkney's Lords.—My royal uncle, bear with me while I speak.—I would, in peace, war, tourney, chase or quest, Live and die with Sir Lancelot.

ARTHUR. So would we all;

And chief of all, the King.

GARETH. Stayest thou away?

LANCELOT. Thou art gallant in thy youth, and my true friend.

I will not mount my horse.

GARETH. My regal kinsman
Calls me to mine. Madam, good day; but first,—
For I am sure good women have good dreams—
Be thou a prophetess.

GWINEVER. Am I a fortune-teller?

GARETH. Answer me;

For all of us are curious of our fates.

Shall I in youth be slain, or thrive in years?

Shall I be lauded by the bard unborn?

GWINEVER. The present and the past are quite enough

To carry with us; let the future be.

Nay, let me fret thee with it still. GARETH. Methinks.

Methinks great men live over again in verse; And our beliefs that certain sleepers drowsed In interlunar lapse do afterwards Wake to fulfil a land's expectancy, Away in faery I know not how long-That these brave tales, whereof story is rife, Mean that departed Worthies, if they inspire A posthumous day, are, by a figure, alive To all succession.

GWINEVER. Miserecordia, let the dead past alone.

LANCELOT. Madam, I have faith

GWINEVER.

In pure youth above manhood, when all's said.

ARTHUR. To the barbican! Gareth, thy fancy is A good book. Merlin prophesied thus of me (Aside).

Arthur. Thy steed neighs. I will hold the stirrup for thee To vault on his back. Is it the roan? Or is't

The milk-white courser, or the bay? Which is't?

ARTHUR. Let us to the barbican, and thou shalt see.

Oh, but our Knights of the Round Table, them I call Ours in common, Gwinever, thine as mine, Every one of them. Bid me good voyage, Love.

GWINEVER. I will gaze after thee, and after thee, Till thou art folded in the greedy hills; Then chide the hills that hide thee. Mine be to mix Thy stirrup cup, vintage of Famagust, That thy veins tingle even as mine do now With never a draught but a good wife's good-bye To thee, my prince, my paragon, my King, Mine own and only love. (Aside) Oh, filthy lies! Yet is he very dear.

ARTHUR. Wonderful Queen!
We'll part in the base-court, at the barbican.
(Aside) Disloyalty in this grace of women? No!
AGRAVAIN. Long live our Lord the King!
GARETH. And Lady Queen!

(Exeunt Arthur and Gwinever attended.)

AGRAVAIN. Shall not the ever-noble Knight of the Lake

Ride to-day? Hast forgot thy zest to love it?

GAWAIN. Thy absence clouds us.

LANCELOT. Misdeem not my mood. There are of men who would disdain all show Of holy zeal, all zeal and countenance Of hearty service. Would I were a boy For joyance in it; but mine is the loss That I am not for it now.

GAWAIN. It were left-handed

If we should press upon thy leisured fame.

Lancelot. Besides, though this hindered not were I due.

I have guests at home.

MORDRED. The court speaks loud of it.

Lancelot. They are my heed.

(Exit.)

MORDRED. Mark ye it in your understanding brothers?

GAWAIN. The King and Lancelot are sun and moon

Respectively. We know it. Wild desire Shines when the sun, setting, doth hide himself; Then sparkles most.

AGRAVAIN. Why then I marvel we Are not ashamed, knowing the astronomy Wherein these noble stars do rise and set, That we, having, I say, the truth, yet suffer Our King, our fount of honour, to be abused Daily and nightly by his trivial Queen; And not a one to bring that to his eyes Which not a drawer in a tavern but Descants upon to raise a laugh, where sit The silly elders of our hamlets benched

In evening session round each village tree,
Throughout the length and breadth of Logris.
Shame,

If we shall suffer it, deserving well

To find our own wives tripping, while good neighbours

Help us to shut our eyes. And still conceives This physical working in our corrupt state, That modesty's a lie, honour an heir Disinherited, and this our bounteous land Lies sick to death with marital distrust, With wives' betrayals, while the name of friend Is a derision and a byword. Sirs, From Camelot as a core, Logris doth rot To the circumference. Arthur's secret sin Is masculine; and a man's heart can die Yet leave the mind erect. What shall we say When woman, having queenship to her dower, All hers, and nought to lack, puts it away, Along with pride, faith, duty, and declines On wantonness?

GAWAIN. Brother, thou hast spoken well, If it be so thou speak'st no more. In sooth, There are degrees in vice; and a man's fame Is truthfulness, a woman's chastity,

Which, either, bruised, by lightness in her case, The lying tongue in his, makes trash of each, · Subject to different standards and rebate, Easements, permissions and insistent law. By this, the kingly credit we concede; Yet our great Arthur hath transgressed in kind The licensed walk of princes. Poise no scales, No balances to weigh him with his Queen, Or they will turn against him. Pardon speech, Sir Mordred, that's too spacious. Agravain, I pray and charge you, as to this particular Ye make such cry on, move never such baggage No more before me. We too much forget Ourselves herein. Even in council seated. Gibes are our table-talk, where we suggest And point a double meaning to the tale Should not be heard; and, swollen with such small wrath.

Such spleen of pruriency, such ire in little, As can in days emasculate vent itself In slander and be safe, our whole diligence Is, if we but propagate ill-repute, To find mares' nests. Wit ye well, I will not Be of this faction.

GARETH. So God me help, nor I;

No, nor be known, Sir brother, of thy deeds.

Mordred. Then that will I.

Gawain. I believe that very well;

For ever unto all unhappiness,

Brother Sir Mordred, thereto wilt thou grant.

Agravain. Thou joined'st us in Lamorake's undoing.

With never a snort. Why lookest sickly here? Men call thee sharp to the touch.

GARWAIN. Suppose I be;

I fear this my asperity too far
To angle for occasion. In few,
I would ye left this, and made not so busy.
I know enough what will become of this.
For that if, 'twixt Sir Lancelot and us,
Rise thereon war and wrath, wit ye well, brothers,
There will full many Kings and nobles hold
With him against us. Besides, he hath retrieved
Arthur's kingdom, not once nor twice; otherwise
The best of us had been full cold at the heart-root;
Had not Sir Lancelot proved the better knight
Than the Round Table of us; as Duke Turquine slain.

With Carados of the Dolorous Tower, both Infamous threats to us. For my life, I'll not

Be against him, till something nearer prick My conscience to it.

AGRAVAIN. Thine own, not Arthur's rub,
Our mother's blemish, not Queen Gwinever's limp,
Thou art tender over. But, as it shall thee list;
Fall of it what fall may, I will disclose
This malady. Let the King prescribe for it;
For I will hide it no longer.

Gawain. Bate thy breath,

Or ever our whole realm's mischieved.

AGRAVAIN.

We'll not.

GAWAIN. Be it on your heads. I list not to your tales.

God speed you speedily to more wit.

Mordred.

And thee.

GARETH. Prithee, brother—I, for one, speak not Evil of him who dubbed me knight. I'd die Upon his hand, first.

GAWAIN. Foolish meddlers, fools,
The fellowship of the Round Table shall
Disperse on this, if ye make war. We ride
With the King now. I turn my back on you.
(Exit, with GARETH.)

AGRAVAIN. We have let slip the best occasion; We have not hinted word, ere the King ride.

MORDRED. Why hint a word? and why not hint with deeds?

My counsel is to let the enamoured Queen Prepare her own confounding. We'll beset Her chamber door, when she and her desires Are closeted together.

AGRAVAIN. Shall she burn for it?

MORDRED. How burn for it, save we fail?

Here will be faction, tumult, hatred, rage;
And, in the very waist of the ship of state,
A mortal combat where the captain cuts

The throat of the pilot, dying in the act
Upon the other's knife. Then, by good luck,
Or shuffle of the froth-and-bubbling hour,
Some buccaneer will seize upon the helm,
The Queen, ere she may burn, the Queen, the crown—
AGRAVAIN. The land, and eke the Lady of the
Land.

MORDRED. Which may be I or thou. The Queen's a slip

Who can revoke her love and give it forth Unto the briskest youth.

AGRAVAIN. Why, then, Prince Mordred,
Thou would'st be King; and lookest toward the
Queen—

To make, perhaps, thy bed as Arthur's?

Mordred. Pshaw!

Thou art not startled by my words; nor I

Afraid of marriage fears. Go to. Root out

Sir Lancelot and his Gaulish kin from Logris,

That keep us too much under, who are born

Of kith and kin with Arthur.

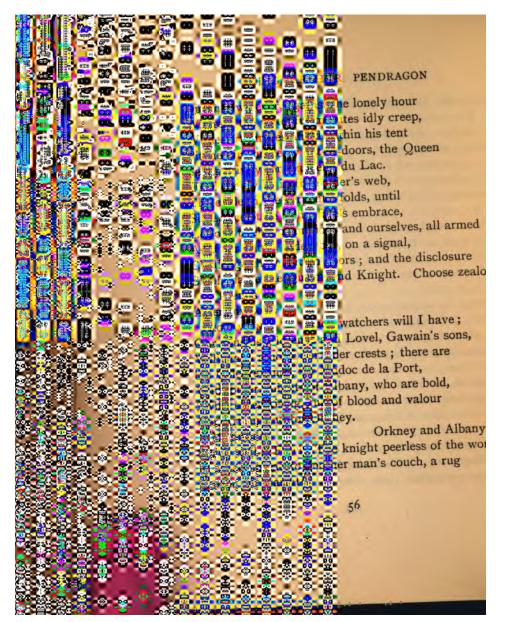
AGRAVAIN. What beyond
Thou wouldst climb to with treason, I scan not;
But wink at thy intent. I look, herein,
That Arthur flourish ampler, like a tree,
The worm at the root once killed.

MORDRED. Then, Agravain,
Gather up knights, some dozen at the least,
Who, or for envy of Sir Lancelot,
Or discontent against the exact King,
Or loathing of this petticoat tyranny
The Queen hath kept between them all, will arm
A watch, as if before a dragon's den,
Upon that meeting which belies the parting
So lover-like our King and Queen made here.
Agravain. We will consort together. I will bring

A posse of knights.

MORDERD. Good brother then at dusk

MORDRED. Good brother, then at dusk. I have sure news—how come by never ask—



(Exit AGRAVAIN.)
My father's divorced wife?

Horrible vision. King Arthur's Queen
Is nought in blood to me. Arthur, my sire,
Wronged me in kind; vengeance in kind were meet,
That, at one blow, quits him, such beauty winning
As makes men pocket up what's foulest. So,
So, as by second sight, I see my star
Arisen Sir Lancelot's Lancelot in her grace,
Reigning in Logris. How I am haunted by
The flattering dream!

(Exit.)

(Re-enter Lancelot with Bors.)

Bors. Uncle, be better advised;

Go not to-night.

Lancelot. And wherefore, nephew mine?

Seeing the Queen sends the Damosel Sauvage
To draw me instantly unto her bower,
With strong expediting and insistent terms
Of safety and solicitude? Her words
Make thine look cowards. Is Queen Gwinever
In counsel with false traitors to destroy
Her own prized honour and my life as well?

Bors. Sir Lancelot, go not this evening. Ever I dread me of Sir Agravain

Who watcheth hourly for to do despite On thee, the Queen, and all of us. My heart Misgives me that King Arthur but withdraws While, peradventure, he hath set a watch. That I most dread of all.

LANCELOT. Have thou no doubt. As for Sir Agravain, it may be so. But for the King, wrong not thy thoughts to think His are not clean above it, that our lapse Looks fouler, trusting him so perfectly. But I have set my course; and hold it firm, With honour in dishonour like a thief's. I must be loyal to disloyalty. Therefore, dear nephew, learn from such as I. The sweets of stolen happiness, dare we Defame them, or decry them? I cancel My lesson even in the reading; buy Sin with repentance, or repent for ever The untasted bliss. Oh, this is death and hell. That I, an elder to a younger man, A loving uncle to a brother's son, But opening my course and way of life, Blast with the narrative. Be sure, to-night, I come, and go, and make no tarrying, Safe in good care.

Bors.

It me repenteth sore.

(Re-enter LA DAMOSEL SAUVAGE.)

LANCELOT. We be friends all, fair Damosel.

DAMOSEL SAUVAGE. Hasten thy steps,

But make them silent. In the chamber burns

The inviting taper.

Lancelor. The Queen beckons me;

Nor would I seem so cowardly, to fail

Her gracious beck, when she invites me so.

The night is dark and silent as the grave;

- And I will teach my heavy bulk to glide

Noiseless as a ghost. (Aside) Wake, heart! Leave not desire

Dead upon her own altar.

Bors.

Go armed.

LANCELOT.

For shame,

To clash into the presence.

(Exit.)

Bors.

Shall this be well?

Damosel Sauvage. Shall they who see so many seasons change

Yet ever keep unchanged, be now divorced,

Forgetting tender years?

Bors.

I fear not that;

But what may grow of treason. Hath the Queen

Arms in her chamber?

Damosel Sauvage. No; for, as I bethink me, The knights of Orkney, even but yesterday, Begged of the King, of special grace, to prove The panoplies and stands of arms that were Sometime within.

Bors. I will to Joyous-Gard.
The drawbridge toward the city is let down.
There will I privily arm our whole kin.
Let sleep in steel those that can sleep at all;
Of which dull brotherhood I am not one,
Till Lancelot be safely come and gone.
Damosel Sauvage. It needs not; but good care.

Bors. Damosel, adieu.

(Exeunt, severally.)

ACT II.

SCENE I .- THE SAME. THE QUEEN'S CHAMBER.

(Enter Lancelot and Gwinever.)

LANCELOT.

I have obeyed thy call, sweet.

GWINEVER.

Lodestar of life,

Time hath become a figment, space a dream, Measure measureless; spirit the sole confine Of spirit.

Lancelot. We have dared the Siege Perilous Wherein is lost whoso climbs thereunto, Where we will sit.

GWINEVER. And amorously transmute
To golden vapour all things. Now, like the maw
Of a dragon is the circumambient world
Round our delight. The hours forget to wear;
The morning tarries; and the eastern beam
Sleeps heavily and late. Our sprightly souls
Glow ardent, yet the steadier. A deep peace
Fills the palace about us.

LANCELOT. Favouring Queen,
Thou speakest verity; 'tis quiet.

Gwinever. So quiet

We listen to quietude as we would

To speech. List! Heard'st thou nought? There is no wind

But sleeps away the night, holier than we. 'Tis not the wind; perhaps it was a bird

Pecked at the pane. Thou hast heard in the wars Such chink and rattle when men march in proof,

To the surprise and fearful night attack.

And yet it never is the line of battle

Close to our chamber. There again! Our door

Is, like a gaol, locked up; yet small the use,

With envy at the keyhole. Listen, listen!

Lancelot. There is nought for it else, but, at the worst,

Our courage and ourselves.

GWINEVER. But is it mail Clashing on plate? I cannot think it be,

That sounds most like it.

Lancelot. Let us reassure ourselves; Our fevered pulses beat upon our brain; It is within and not without our being, That the alarum sounds; would that it were not

An inward foe appals us.

GWINEVER. Hark! oh, hark!

The clank of armour's there. But shall we fear

What danger be around us?

AGRAVAIN AND THE 12 KNIGHTS (Within). Look to thyself!

AGRAVAIN (Within). Thou traitor knight, Sir Lancelot du Lac,

Now art thou taken.

GWINEVER. Alas! we are lost together!

LANCELOT. Not yet, sweetest.

AGRAVAIN (Within). Come out of the Queen's chamber.

For wit thou well that thou art so beset Thou escapest not us.

THE KNIGHTS (Within). Traitor knight, traitor knight!

GWINEVER. By voice, I tell Sir Agravain, at least; And, by the volume of the noise, there be Many besides, I wot, all surely armed Beyond resisting.

THE KNIGHTS (Within). Come forth! Yield thee, recreant!

Lancelot. Madam, is here armour of any sort Within your chamber, for a coverture

Of strength upon my body?

GWINEVER. I have none; I have none. Wherefore I dread me sore

Our long love is come to a mischievous end.

I shall burn.

Lancelot. Never will we suffer it.

Now had I liefer than rule Ecbatan

Sure harness were on my back. In all my life

Was never I bested thus, to be slain

Full shamefully for lack of armour. That men

Spake of what prowess closed my account!

KNIGHTS (Within). Recreant!

AGRAVAIN (Within). Craven in thy gilt, open the door.

And look upon thy death. Thou hast attained Thy term, thy limit and thy goal of life.

IST KNIGHT (Within). A hurdle and the dragging through the streets!

2nd KNIGHT (Within). Unto a traitor's execrated shame!

3rd Knight (Within). A cage, to hang thy quarters up in air!

AGRAVAIN (Within). And, for the woman that hath sold her King

For fairing, ribands and a jig, the stake!

GWINEVER. They prophesy their wish. Still true is my trust,

No danger whatsoever I stand in But thou'lt' yet clear me.

AGRAVAIN (Within). Blot upon womanhood!

Lancelot. That shameful cry and noise we may not brook.

Better were death at once, than sufferance
Of their malignity. Beseech thee, Queen,
As thou hast ever been my special, good
And Christian lady, and I, at all times,
Thy true and poor knight to my power, nor failed
thee

In right nor yet in wrong, from the first day
That Arthur made me knight, pray for my soul,
As needs it must be grievous in its pains,
If that I here be slain. Urre of Hungary, with
My nephew, and the remnant of my kin,
In a blood-feud, will labour for thee; sooth,
Mine own dear lady, take good comfort home,
Whatever come to me. Sir Bors will do thee
All pleasure, on my father's lands, he may,
To thine accustomed ease.

GWINEVER. Sir Lancelot, I will not live a day after thy days.

An thou be slain, meekly I take my death, As Christian may do though a sinful Queen As ever sinned, or shall sin.

Lancelot. Well, Madam,
Sith it is so the day is come our loves
Depart for ever, wit thou well, I shall
Sell my life dearly on it. A thousand-fold
Heavier am I for thee than for myself.

Gwinever. 'Sooth, would they took and slew me, so thou wert

Safe and sound from them!

LANCELOT. That shall not be said.

Keep me, at least, from that. Now be my spear What power above will help so bad a man

As I have proved in life!

GWINEVER. Lo! the door shook

Through the heart of oak, as terror-stricken!

AGRAVAIN (Within). Once more,

Dash once again upon it! Batter it, knights!— Sir Lancelot, we have a great form from the hall, Wherewith will we knock at thy gate until Thou greet us hand to hand.—Dash yet again!

LANCELOT. Fair Lords, put by your dashing and your shouts;

For I will open to you, that ye do

Your list of evil. Wind, Love, my mantle close About my forearm, gentle Gwinever. I'll pluck the bar away, and let them in, One at a time.

(Lancelot lets in Colgrevance.)

Colgrevance (Striking at him). Have at thee!

Lancelot. And at thee!

(Takes him a buffet that breaks his neck.) Slip the bar in its place. Their goodly all Moves nought upon the hinges, but my arm Shuts our defences close again.

GWINEVER. Arm! arm!
In Colgrevance's armour, for heaven's sake, arm!
His neck is broken. They beat on the door
That holds them not long out. Put on the steel.

LANCELOT. A defter squire buckled not piece on piece,

Than Gwinever.

KNIGHTS (Within). Unbar the door! It splits!
AGRAVAIN (Within). Thou slayest Sir Colgrevance who is but stunned,

Thou murderer.

Lancelot. Let be your insolence; For, heaven's grace me befriending, ye shall not Imprison me to-night. I give in pledge

My faith unto our Order I profess
With you of Knighthood, if an ye now depart,
I shall, in due form cited, stand before
King Arthur and what accusation is brought,
What question raised, what against me inferred,
To make my answer as knight ought to do,
How hither I came unto my Queen, for no
Intent of evil.

AGRAVAIN (Within). We will take thee, maugre thy head;

Or slay thee on the doorstep here.

KNIGHTS (Within). Fie on thee, traitor!

LANCELOT. Ah, Sirs, is there none other grace with you?

Then keep yourselves.

(Sets the door wide, discovering them.)

AGRAVAIN. Take him, Sirs; bind him sure.

(AGRAVAIN attacks, is felled and swoons. Exit Lancelot among them, slaying some and driving Mordred and the rest in.)

Gwinever. Safe, safe among them, slay them, Lancelot!

Oh, wealth of horror! how like standing rye Before the reaper falls this crop of steel. Lancelot, like to ancient Time, doth wield

A mortal scythe. Oh, what a harvest home!
One moment raging dragons; and the next
Ingots of metal, dead as is the mine
Wherefrom their steel was dug. I am their Queen;
These are my husband's strength, his loyal friends
That I rejoice are fallen.

(Re-enter LANCELOT.)
To my arms!

Let us give thanks, so far.

Are here to destroy us both.

Lancelot. Our good days now

Are at an end. These horrid witnesses

GWINEVER. We have our tongues; the dead are dumb.

LANCELOT.

Madam,

Now will King Arthur ever be my foe Out of the possibility of truce Or mending. Friendship lies among the dead. And therefore, Gwinever, if it like thee well That I may have thee with me, I will beat Danger away from thy side.

GWINEVER. That is not best,
But as a last resort. Thou hast done such harm,
It will be well thou hold thee still with this.
Go to thy home.

What washing, and the hiding of the dead,
Or coined wherefore of disaster may,
I will attempt to muffle up the eyes
And saucy scrutiny of the smug times,
To wad the nose and ear. We'll walk by stealth
A little longer.

Lancelot. I doubt if that may be. Mordred was among them.

GWINEVER. Of that we never dreamed.

Lancelot. And Mordred is fled alive; although I know

He bears deep trenches on him.

GWINEVER. Malevolent fate! Yet is his credit small, except for lies. Or he may lie for shame, and put a colour

Of accident on this. Go home. Let me Meet Arthur with such craft and subtlety As hath renowned my sex, time out of mind. Redeem me, at the worst, from that reserved

For such as I am.

LANCELOT. My arm hath cunning, Queen, To pluck thee though from hell-fire. Exchange rings, And kisses. By this gage will we renew Our springtide.

GWINEVER. Ring changes upon these rings.

Regret comes near reproach. Oh, kiss me, kiss me!

Lancelot. Enchanting mistress, I will stand to arms

In Joyous-Gard, with my retainers. One kiss On thy lips, Gwinever!

(Exit LANCELOT.)

We overhang GWINEVER. A pit of bottomless loss. From temporal fires I count me safe. Out of this heart of flame Wherein I burn alive and yet endure, No power can pluck me, save forgiving heaven. I am not busy upon that. I'll weave Such witchery as I may to stultifiy My noble Lord withal. Be calm, my tread, Along the path I walk, which is all fire Of evil and sick passion. Hark! I hear The horn of Arthur at the barbican. Most unexpected. Which of us is least glad? I know his challenge. What a home-coming! His blasted hearth I sit by, and enchant The poison pottage of a wife's deceit. I love my King; and eke I love my knight; Two loves as diverse as the sconces borne By Judith and Salome. Had I been Given in marriage to Sir Lancelot,

Arthur had pulled me, had Arthur essayed
Forbidden fruit. I cheat the interval
Whose moments, like armies with scaling-ladders,
Invest me. Arthur's foot is in the hall.
Even while I babble, Arthur's eyes catch sight
Of the fresh prey that strews the homely floor
From my feet unto his. I wait to hear
The breath drawn inward through the teeth, that
speaks

Wondering horror. Oh, I have adorned My homestead with rare garnish!

(Enter LA DAMOSEL SAUVAGE.)

Damosel?

Damosel Sauvage. Bethink you of counsel. Arthur, as he rode

Among the gathering of mist and storm,

This side the lake of marvels—

GWINEVER. I hear thee, girl.

DAMOSEL SAUVAGE. When among the Waste Lands, a sullen moan

Filled the ear of the region, as if Merlin spake, Out of his tree where, by enchantment, starves That sorcerer who held these halls in fee Sometime, to our good peace. Whether 'twas so— For Nimue's voice was heard, too, like a dirge;

And, certes, there the thorn is rooted—certain
It is, King Arthur, with his ears all ringing,
Turned rein from purpose of his pilgrimage,
And made for Camelot. When near the gate—
The whole of this I hear and tell again
Unsorted as it came into mine ear—
Sir Mordred met him, almost dead with wounds,
Whose words put fleeter feathers in the wing
Which speeds King Arthur upon us. Arthur strides
From hall to bower; my words, like fife and drum,
Keep time to his approaching.

(Exit LA DAMOSEL SAUVAGE.)

GWINEVER.

Thanks, and fly!

(Enter Arthur, Gawain and Gareth attended, with Mordred wounded.)

Bless our safety!

ARTHUR. What safety? No suspicion, But to be well assured the wife I love Is my friend's—never mind! Stand forth, Thou who wast Regent of my soul. Gehenna! The law prescribes the manner of thy death To be by tongues of fire.

GWINEVER. Send me strength for it! Who are my accusers?

ARTHUR. These, upon the ground,

Reproaching me with my too long delay. I had a deeming ever. It were best I had been ruthless.

GWINEVER. Hath not Mordred said A word in this?

MORDRED. I have; but not enlarged Beyond approving.

AGRAVAIN. Give me a cup of water. My dying lips,

Cursing my meddlesome righteousness, assure
Sir Mordred's faith in this. I am hurt to death;
But, as I die, avouch the Queen is false;
And Lancelot du Lac betrays thy home.
Now carry me out friends (Dies)

Now, carry me out, friends. (Dies.)

ARTHUR. Live, and speak further.

GARETH. There is no breath in any of the rest; Nor more in Agravain!

ARTHUR. By the Holy Grail,
'Tis thy unwifely doing; oh, that it be!
Dear Lancelot, and hast thou struck me down?
Most dearest Gwinever—No, not that name!

GWINEVER. Why not that name?

ARTHUR. Be nameless. Over due Standeth the extreme debt. Thou shalt not commit Adultery. Humanity must bow,

A humble disciplinary.

GWINEVER. It was thy friend,
Because we are beholden to him so,
To chaste rewarding sought me. Privily?
Yes. Stealthily? Yes; only to keep quiet
Tongues of men and women.

ARTHUR. Stealthily! Privily!
Thou hast said it. Logris languisheth, till
I rescind love even as it never were.
But that's accomplished to my hand; my friend
Annihilates friendship; my wife hath been nothing
Any time these ten years. Nourishment's not in food,

Till I, with him whom we both love, am quit
Up to the total and the reckoning,
Whatever the odds prove. Look what is here;
A bed-chamber, a slaughter-house. Oh, see!
Gwinever. Wilt lay this at my door? Is it my fault

I am beautiful?

ARTHUR. Forbid it! Would that I were No King to look on this; then might I fall On mine own sword, and perish. But, O wife That art so perfect in thy outward show, Thy inward want, making all this illusion,

There is not, in the law of the land, a place Of refuge for thee.

Gwinever. Oh, is all blown away?

Is the past changed? No refuge? Husband, husband,

What lacks in me? Am I less debonair? Honey of courtship, syrup in matronhood, Arthur, Arthur, Arthur, the days we have shared, The nights we have spent together, are they become Utterly hateful? Touch me, ere I am cinders; Feel me; wilt make charcoal of me?

ARTHUR. Unclean, unclean,

How long hast played the traitress? Time and oft I have pitied thee; and thou hadst little sense But thou didst know it; and knew'st thou couldst come home,

And I, thy catalogue of shame once read,
Obliterate the text. Oh, agony!
One hour from this, thou wilt be so much ash.
To speak of pity mocks thee. Agony!
I take God's vengeance out of his raised hand,
Lest it appal us, overdoing ours
That falls short of eternal. Give the law way;
Logris consigns thee to it.

GARETH.

Lad though I be,

None elder speaks, so I must. Justice disused In laxity harms less than violence Done upon ruth that here lies bleeding. Ah, For hope of grace to come—

ARTHUR. Her doom is pronounced, Her sentence past; our tears, never so wet, Cannot put out the fire; but, dropping down, They hiss and are not.

GWINEVER. Then will we choke our sobs. Then, young and old, who look on this fell scene, Whoso accuseth me, up and maintain The fight upon Sir Lancelot du Lac.

MORDRED. Sir Lancelot is our bane, our bale.

GAWAIN. He'll prosper

On the best of us. The boldest of these dead men

Attacked his open hour.

GWINEVER. But that he spoiled Sir Colgrevance le Gore of armour, it had Gone hard with us. Bid the heralds' shrilly blast Sound for ordeal by combat. I demand it.

ARTHUR. And finally, I do refuse it thee.
There are hard causes, doubtful to be tried,
Where heaven, since human seeking is at fault
To draw the truth forth, fights in the lists, by hand
Of mortal proxy. But may we expect

Such intervention where the fact, the fact Lies patent to our senses? This derides The last resort of judgment, with a call Of idleness, and makes the seat of awe Angry with us. There lieth no appeal.

Gwinever. Am I denied my knight? Then, wheresoever,

Save me who save can!

ARTHUR. One task there is, one task,
Sir Gawain who, even in my loss of loss,
I know art passionate for thy sons cut off,
Sir Lovel and Sir Florence, who lie yonder—
GAWAIN. Although they are my sons—they earned their death.

ARTHUR. One thing remains to do. Prompt me in it.

GAWAIN. It is to call priests to the fallen; lest,

Peradventure, one life be not extinct; and let Lead Sir Mordred out of harm's way; he is hurt Sorely.

ARTHUR. The execution.

GAWAIN. Alack!

When we hear multitudinous duty call To many matters, must we, for the more tart

And bitterest, put the more contenting by; Not leave the worst for last? I am out of love With this.

ARTHUR. The execution, dear my nephew, Some human hand must do it. Therefore, dear nephews,

Ere our hearts break, no weak postponement, none, Chain her, as Thekla, by the waist to the stake. Let heaven hold the balance by the index; Not damn her for wronging me. To the flames, Gawain.

Sir Gawain and Sir Gareth, lead away her That was our Queen, who never was our Queen, But did appear to be so. Lay on the arrest With dismal rites befitting.

GARETH. Sire, command, And I must do it, though against my will, But by thy strait commandment. I will ride In peaceable and civil weed, nor wear Harness of war upon me.

ARTHUR. In the name of Heaven,
Then make you ready. She shall have her judgment.

Other knights shall be armed. I have long known It is not but thou art guilty. Take thy doom,

And shorten ours that doom thee.

GWINEVER. Heaven's dearth of mercy
On the Mercy Seat! I am Sir Lancelot's—
In the full meaning of slander, if thou wilt.
'Tis woman's part to suffer for a cause
That men rejoice in; else there were a voice
Out of the grave of Queen Margause to doom
Thy body quick to the burning.

(Exit Gwinever, guarded by Gawain, Gareth and the rest, except Arthur and Mordred.)

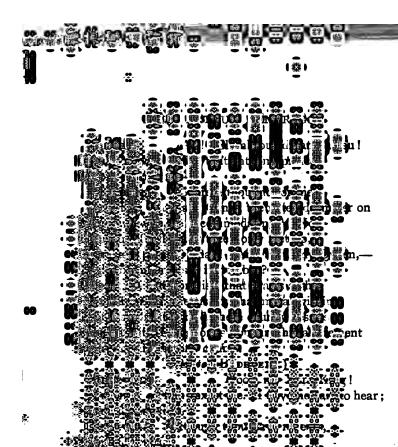
ARTHUR. Beaconless

Despair! Am I insensible? Am I cold, After those icy days when I have doubted What to-day strips?

MORDRED (Falling). Father!
ARTHUR. My sinfulness
Absolves me not from punishing. Can sin
Wake fellow-feeling tenderness? Rather
It whets us to be cruel; and he forgives
Freeliest, who is innocence itself; which I
Am not.

MORDRED. Thou seest me fall; my wounds gape wide.

ARTHUR. Hath none yet tended them? MORDRED. None. And I bleed.



Knapt at the quillons. O King Arthur, hear! Grieve, if thou canst; or else rejoice, seeing Deliverance is wrought; rejoice with me Among my fellows, many of whom die; And they not the least happy.

ARTHUR. Are there more dead;

Or speak'st thou of this crop? Half the Round Table

Lie on the ground already.

Bedevere. Arthur, hear.

Even as we roped about the market square;
And built the abhorred pyre with faggots heaped
About the deadly stake, leading the Queen
To the last chapter of her infamy;
Even as the chain was riveted upon
Her bosom, like an answer to her prayers,
Embattled on their barbed chargers, burst
Sir Lancelot, Sir Tristan and Sir Bors,
Out of their walls, as from a burning mount,
With all their kindred in array of war.
Their couched spears swept all our knights away.

ARTHUR. And Gwinever?

Like haycocks dancing on a freshet flood.

(Re-enter GAWAIN.)

Bedevere. Sir Gawain; hear him speak.

GAWAIN. Yes, I will speak. Gareth, my brother is dead

By that same hand he loved, Sir Lancelot's hand. A lamb beside the pyre, Sir Gareth stood, And fell as in the shambles, not a blow Dealt in reply; but, as detesting life, Constrained to ride in his dear Queen's despite, He bared his head even to the furious blows Of the onsetting Lancelot who, blind To all but Gwinever, ploughed his way through The thick of our defence. Unarmed or armed, We fared alike, and fell, such blows he rained, Sir Tristan and Sir Bors seconding him, As never foot-thick steel, though Milan proof, But had betrayed its trust. Look on my sword Cut like a straw, reaped like a blade of grass. In one encounter with Sir Lancelot's edge Wherewith he mowed our host.

ARTHUR. And Gwinever?

GAWAIN. Safe. And Sir Gareth dead; and Agravain.

Florence and Lovel dead. Oh, she is safe In Lancelot's arms, in Castle Joyous-Gard, Maugre the might of us.

ARTHUR. The powers above forefend,

But I am overjoyed!

GAWAIN. Sir Gareth loved
Sir Lancelot more than his own mother's sons
And I, the son of his own mother, saw
Sir Lancelot slay him. Is this but a tale
For the inglenook? Marshal thine utmost force,
King Arthur; are thy laws not set at nought,
Thy justice scouted and thy wedlock soiled,
Thy bride new-husbanded with shame, thy glory
Laughed at? And, at this pass, the barbarous Pict
Shall leave us murder, seeing thee so shrunken,
The only word in use.

ARTHUR. We will school yet
What pagan dare impinge upon our skirts.
Here lay we siege and leaguer. Who is lost
In this first brush and tumult, let me know.
With all surviving, and new levies culled,
We will at Joyous-Gard knock at the door.

GAWAIN. A thousand thanks that thou wilt do it, my liege.

I shall bestir in this.

ARTHUR. Our blood-tie proves
The hardier root, out-dating fellowship.
Mordred! Mordred! I cannot break from this,
I did beget thee. Where thou liest in wounds

Thou art dear to me. Ye of my mother's house, Gawain and Mordred, let us not forget, I am compound of one kind with Margause, Mother to thee and thee. Your hands. I'm tricked, To speak the unavoidable verity. In friendship and at home. I must wear to it, To be the common talk and parable: Yet, oh! the blackness of discomfiture, Desolate beyond dreaming, everywhere Ruin—but in yourselves, dear princes! MORDRED. Deeds Speak for me! I keep not my bed past need. Once whole again, Mordred shall let thee know What love in Mordred lives. Sir Bedevere, Lend me thy strength to rise.

ARTHUR. Thee will we dress, With any other wounded. Gentle hands, give Sir Mordred carriage to our chamber.

MORDRED. I have ease,

As but from trifling harm. Sire, I walk well.

ARTHUR. And I would have thee stout. But, first of all,

To probe and tent thee, Mordred—thy punishing O' thy mother's fault—I must be clear on the point, Before I sign the death-warrant of doubt,

And trust thee daringly—was't terribly just, Or done in anger and distracted spleen? Thou'lt question me again, about my doom On Gwinever; was it terribly just, Or angerly? Who dare dig down, and tunnel Along the channels of his acts, even To the wellsprings? Our duty bids assail Sir Lancelot of the Lake.

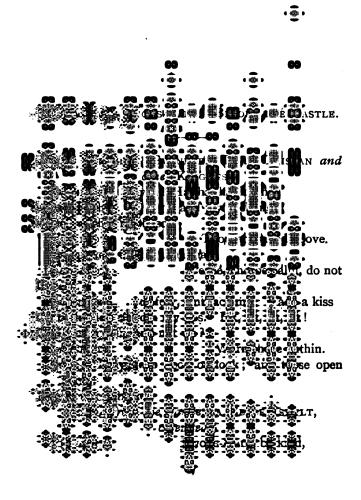
GAWAIN.
Fair uncle!

And our revenge,

ARTHUR. Assail the Castle Joyous-Gard. Gwinever, though she thundered at my heart, I have forgotten; how shall I forget Lancelot of the Lake? Storm Joyous-Gard!

(Exeunt Omnes.)





As unto us poor vagrants, to thy lord
Who makes thee proud, so being, and to the Queen.
O Iseult, from these lofty towers of strength,
Cast out a ladder, as Rapunzal did,
To draw Queen Gwinever and Sir Lancelot up.
GWINEVER. Then close the door, and let us run

stark mad,
With the rejoicing of this happy day.

Close fast the doors; let not remorse come in, Remorse more terrible than the Table Round Bristling with vengeful steel. Pull to the oak, Stronger in proof than my poor chamber door To shut the insistence of man or of remorse, Remorse, I say, for all that follows on, Out of our lives.

Lancelot. My walls are thick, my moat Deep enow for their drowning.

GWINEVER.

Where is Iseult?

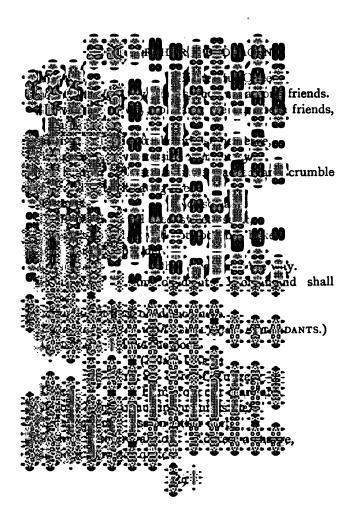
LANCELOT. Here, at the very door, pale with affright.

Bors. They hang upon our rear.

LANCELOT. We will shake them off;

Have no fear of it. Gentle Iseult, I pray Speak comfort to my Lady Gwinever With every gentleness.





LANCELOT. Be it far from me
That I should do this thing; nor overstep
My ward alone, which is enough to do.
King Arthur trusts thee. Like a merchant, go
Buy peace, if it be possibly bought, if it
Be for sale at a price.

URRE. I will; and roundly Make my attempt in it.

(Exit.)

Lancelot. It were tyrannous
To hold my Lady, beyond needful care
Of guardianship; some safeguard, and she rides
Homeward through Camelot.

(Enter LAVAIN.)

Who steppeth sprightly?

LAVAIN. My Lord, accept of me. I am a young knight; men call me Lavain;

My sister loved thee; and, for love of thee,

Passioned and died, Elain of Astolat.

Now, that heaven hath her, and the King's peace fails,

Fain would I serve thee, in degree and kind As youth desires toward thee, thou peerless peer.

Lancelor. Thou hast guessed rightly that we much need youth

To make our old years savoury. Wilt thou die To-morrow, an't please heaven?

LAVAIN. Gladly by thy side.

LANCELOT. Certainly by my side.

(Trumpet sounded and answered.)

I know that trumpet well. It speaks in wrath To me, for the first time to-day. Sir Bors de Ganis,

It were the easiest thing on earth

To turn this necessary act and strife

Wholly to my gain. Wrong hath provoked wrong;

And I could push it so that the King's crown,

Yea, with his gory head beneath it, dropt

Unto my riches. I have the Queen, alike

In her desire and my possession, strong

On both counts. We will speak and to the point.

(Re-enter URRE, with ARTHUR attended, GAWAIN,

Bedevere, Lucan, Dagonet and other Knights.)

GAWAIN. Thou givest appellant breath.

LANCELOT.

Shall it be war?

ARTHUR. What else but war, when thou hast taken my wife

Body and soul?

LANCELOT. That were ruin indeed.

True, I have given her asylum here;

Most true; the rest is constructive. Frantic King

Whose grief's thy enemy more than I, before This boisterous thunderstorm burst over Logris, Shall I be heard? For, by the Holy Grail, My heart misgives me for the issue of it, When I must do my best.

ARTHUR. Oh, specious opening!

LANCELOT. Hear me what I urge

Let Gwinever thy Queen come to her court.

Cite thy full peerage, princes of the blood,

To summary yet plenary council joined

With her and me.

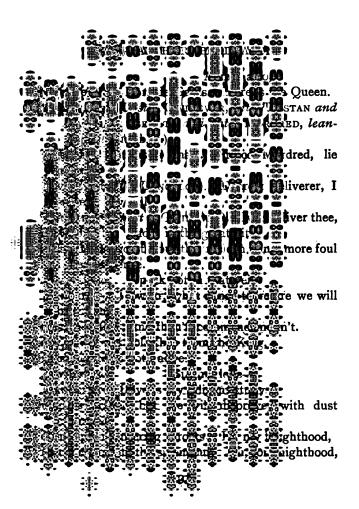
ARTHUR. 'Tis best we sound the bottom
Of all this horror. Fetch my galled son
Sir Mordred; and thou, Gawain, at my right hand,
Give me support. Will my rebellious Queen
Vouchsafe her presence?

Lancelot. Not as one arraigned;
Turn that spite from her; nor as one condemned;
But as a principal and equal voice
Imperial and imperious to be heard
For Britain's consort. While, since the Cornish state

Weighs in the scale, admit Sir Tristan. Tristan, Request our dear Queen's presence.

(Exit, into Castle, Tristan.)





Get thee back to thy queenship beside Arthur.

Gwinever. But shall we meet as heretofore?

Shall we

Meet as before?

Lancelot. I think we have met our last. Yet abides strength in the resolve, thou'lt shine, Living down calumny. What more can we? Can we unmake the past?

GWINEVER. No, nor would not.

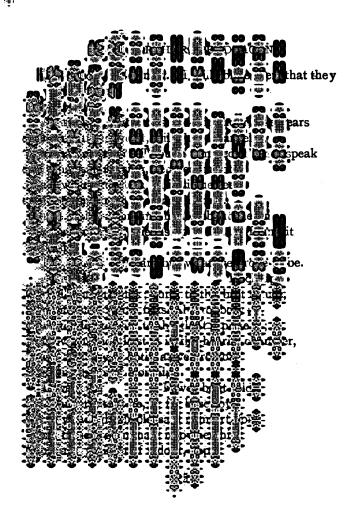
But what is here? The dish thou dressest for me,

Taste of it and try. Shall I eat gems, to stay
Heart and soul hunger, who have eaten and drunk
Thee? Or shall breath of honesty's commending
Be deputy and fill the place of love,
Doing his offices? Must it be so?
I have no children, and love must conclude
In its own end. Must I always break bread
At the Round Table?

Lancelot. Yes, we being honourable. Arthur is thronged about with the princes, lo, Already!

GWINEVER. What is that to Gwinever? Carry me off, carry me off, hide me In infamy, yet carry me off.





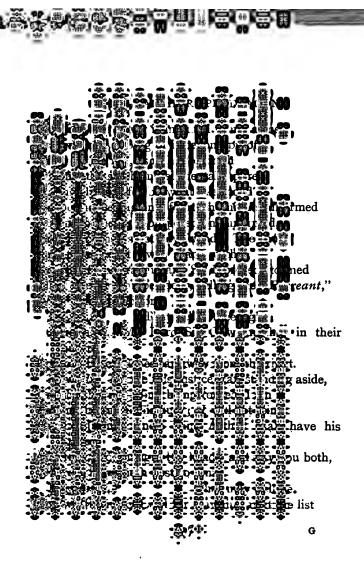
Lady from her honour. Openly, I shew
Queen Gwinever to you in your midst. I ask
Only to re-seat her by my Lord's side,
Immutably throned; myself to come and go,
In good peace, without molestation,
Intact and scatheless; and the Queen exempt
From retrospect and all reflection,
In clean acquittal, as being quite pure
Of gross attaint, accusing thoughts dismissed,
And she unthreatened, neither for the past
Nor for the days to come, nothing suspect
Nor sought against her. This confirmed on oath
Draweth us face to face.

ARTHUR. Set her here, we charge thee, If thou'lt not fly with her, as—great Heavens!—thou shouldst.

Lancelot. Sweareth my Lord to this that I propose?

ARTHUR. I swear to thy bodily safety and hers; Hers for her natural life's term, thine for this once Hither and hence to pass.

LANCELOT. King Arthur, if knight
Of what degree soever, except your person
And my Lord Prince Sir Garwain's, murmur against
Queen Gwinever, I, Lancelot of the Lake,



To ride out with my horsemen, ye should win Me and her more hardily than ever ye won A strong battle yet. Here I make my avaunt, That yet never I found no manner knight But I was over hard for him, had I done Mine uttermost; howbeit, I have been matched With dangerous knights, as Tristan and Lamorake; But ever I had a favour to them, and prized What they were. And the truth of Heaven I take Unto witness how I was never wroth Nor greatly heavy with no knight I saw Busy about to win worship; but have waxt Glad to find knight able to endure me On foot or horse. Upon the other hand, Sir Turquine and Sir Carados whose crimes Were notorious, when they flung thee overthwart The saddle-bow, I slew both in thy sight. And I dare swear, I met never no man So strong as they, nor so well fighting. With them I fought to my uttermost, for their pride of strength Was vilely used to the Round Table's bane, And your abuse; which stands thee in reason And charity thou shouldst remember. Sir Gawain. Might I have thy goodwill, my better hope that I might recover the King's grace.

GAWAIN. I believe it well. But by chivalry I swear it,

Thou hast many long days overreached me

And Orkney, and hast destroyed many good knights.

Lancelot. Thou sayest as it pleaseth thee, gentle Sir,

Yet may it never be on me openly laid That, before-cast of treason, I slew knight, As thou, my Lord Sir Gawain, hast; never But in defence and saving of my life.

GAWAIN. By that thou pointest at Sir Lamorake. I slew him: I declare it.

Lancelot. Not by thyself;
That had been over much; for he was of
The best knights Christian of his age. It was
Shame and great pity of his overthrow.

GAWAIN. Sith thou upbraid'st me of Sir Lamorake's death,

Wit thou well, I will leave thee not, till thou'rt So disadvantaged, that thou shalt not scape Out of my hand.

Lancelot. What boots it me to speak?

I trust thee well enough, if thou win me,

I shall find little mercy. Oh, my King,

When I have battled on the Queen's side, thou hast

Been greatly pleased with me. Arthur, what wrong She hath lain under, ere this, thou knowest full well; And, sith it pleased thee I should do her right At many times making good her defence Even in the lists, meseemeth I have more cause To redeem her now, in so much as she should burn For my sake. My very noble Lord, receive Into thy keeping Gwinever, the cause Unwitting, now the close, as I would have it, Of this rupture.

ARTHUR. The sceptre is toward thee, Princess.

Gwinever. This is a strange meeting. I should be dead,

Had thy word its fulfilment.

ARTHUR.

A meeting

And a parting both.

GWINEVER. Hast thou two mouths to speak? Am I reserved.

Stalled, to be fed, against that fastidious law Awaken empty?

ARTHUR. We are beyond law now; Amenable law stoops her meek neck, doing Obeisance to main force.

GWINEVER. Praise be to force for it!

ARTHUR. I know thee foul; I cannot punish thee;

The realm sickens against thee; taking thee home Were good as I shook off my crown, melting The balm from my annealed locks. Were I A day-labourer, the sweating knave who turns Our kitchen spit, an honest drudge of the people, I would not do my conscience so much wrong As to cohabit with thee. Yet be thy sin Its own corrective; fare sumptuously, fear No pinch there; eat, drink, breathe, sleep, clothe thyself, reign Ostensibly honoured. Oh! I have loved thee singly, In simplicity a lover. What went before Was a flash of fire in the blood, a fortuitous Rashness, I will never justify it; Given into my ghostly accuser's hand, It is a hostage; I acknowledge that. Still, that hath not divided room with thee; That notwithstanding, what was ours, to prove Perfective in our sex's complement. Thou and my heart know. Woman, to thy bower. ISEULT. O Queen of passion, woe is me for thee! GWINEVER. Oh. Love! ISEULT. The world trembles before thy loveliness. LANCELOT. Madam, commend me truly when thou prayest.

Let me have knowledge lightly if thou be annoyed Of false tongues. If knighthood may bestead thee, Believe it, I shall not fail.

GWINEVER. I it is fail. There's little tune in age When youth's done. Oh! for a bursting sigh, for a song To drown in! Oh, to be a sud of the sea, That is nothing but froth!

DAGONET. Go to, thou rib,

Thou after-thought, sin no more.

(Exit GWINEVER, attended.)

LANCELOT.

Who dare say

She is not chastity?

ARTHUR. I. Lancelot.

Mordred, we enclose her in thy charge. To her Be kinder than I dare trust myself to be.

Lancelot of the Lake, for thee, I am

Justice and jealousy on one charger set,

To thy dejection. Oh, thy right hand is falsehood I' the warm grip!

GAWAIN. We have heard speech, Lancelot. An if King Arthur forgive thee, though mine uncle, He shall lose my service. So I let thee to wit. Thou slewest Sir Agravain; he bid for death. Thou'st slain my two sons; they, like foolish Jacks, Bought death; I'll not avenge them. But Sir Gareth,

Thou'st slain my brother, slain Gareth, there it is, Traitorously and piteously; for he bare harness none Of war against thee, nor would none put on.

LANCELOT. Would to our dear Faith he had been walled in steel!

Can I not wash my hands, when the harm done Was in the throng and press, against my will; Unlucky that I am? As for thy brother, I loved none of my kinsmen more; my sights, Which are as the credentials of my grief, Bemoan him without end; not for no fear That sways me; but for causes sorrowful; First, that I dubbed him knight; then for I wot He loved me above earthly knight, and I him Who did epitomize gentleness bound up Frankly within included; he was a boy, A man, either in years, and both together In his clear spirit.

GAWAIN. There thou liest not;
Gareth who idolized thee, couldst not turn,
Black executioner, from such a child?
Despite perplexity in appearances,
Which makes not wrong undone, to our Lord the King,
Thou art adulterous, murderous under a cloak,
Ambitious, and a past-master in

Villainy on the House of Orkney.

LANCELOT.

Be it

That thou, Sir Gawain, charge me to my face, In such high treason, I must pardon crave, For needs must that I answer thee.

GAWAIN.

We are past that,

As at this time assembled, under oath,
To use no violence. Get thee off safe,
Of whole flesh, as thou camest. But in Britain
Abide not over fourteen days ensuing
On this; nor look for immunity in flight,
I warn thee. So the King and we were assented
Ere thou cam'st hither. We will second thy worst;
And break thy strongest castle upon thy head,
For as far off as thou runnest.

LANCELOT.

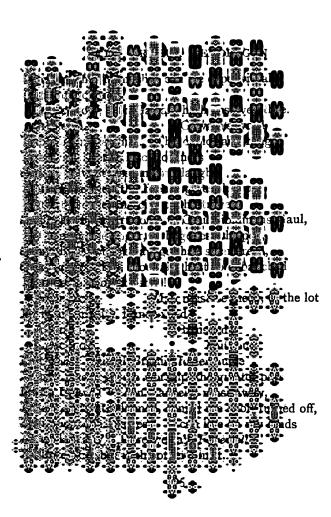
What jest is here?

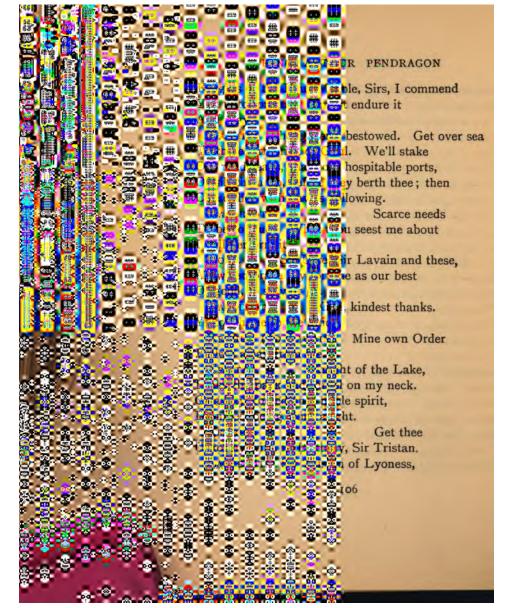
Had I known your intent, I had answered
To never a word, but looked over my wall,
Although a twelvemonth's watch, ere I came down
To be misused for refuse. Arthur Pendragon,
Art assenting to this calamitous hate,
Thou Prince of Princes?

ARTHUR. Thy playmate thou hast redeemed. But in what guise,

We twain, can we inhabit the same court;







Cross not to Armorica. A peril stalks
Round about our dissension. Keep Logris
Upon that quarter that confronts King Mark
Whom I know greedy on't.

TRISTAN. Less content, I will.

Sir Andret hath been with me, proffering peace,

If I will lead my Cornish Queen homeward,

Equivocal hints not thought on. I will start

Forthright for Cornwall, with la Beale Iseult,

To her siege of kingdom, westward with the sun

where

Above the breakers, Arthur's birthplace hangs.

ISEULT. Sir Andret makes us trust King Mark forgives,

Forgets, and will forego the recompense Of our sweet error.

TRISTAN. I will fashion me As Arthur's rampart there whither I go, Believe me; I will be immovable, After thy noble wish.

MORDRED (Aside). King Mark's cousin Andret And I do federate with Mark to rock Tristan asleep there.

ISEULT. We to Tintagil; thou To Brittany.

Lancelot. Let us part without words; I have none left.

(Exeunt Tristan and Iseult.)

Bors. What cheer, my Lord?

LANCELOT (To Bors and URRE). Sir Mordred

Once clad in faculties, what he will do

I fear. Many rebellions in my day

I have crushed; and what time after me begets

I dread more than I know.

Bors.

Only in thee

Rests our stability.

LANCELOT. Not wholly, I trow;

Though it please thee to say it. For you, fair Lords, My livelihood, parted by gifts alike

Equalling my share, shall make you lords in Gaul.

Now is the fellowship of the Round Table

Broken, that bare King Arthur up; and quiet,

Weeping, forsakes this realm. O my old friend,

My King, my host in Logris where I have lodged

These many years, I will no more abide

The bitterness of thy frown.

(Exit with Bors, URRE, LAVAIN and all his own

Party.)

GAWAIN.

What wilt thou, Arthur?

What art thou, King?

ARTHUR. I am most sure I am wronged. The hollowness of the world Sounds in his kingly terms. Kingly he is, The son of Kings before him. Have I no quarrel In the avenging of my ravished bed, Because the meek spirit of courtesy Possesses this devil with legions Of ready words? Oh, heartless gift of speech! Guile's apotheosis! A pit-fall of a man Semblably covered up; his excellent fancies, Bastards unto his reputation, Have, with a lordly ease, deflowered the house That made his lodging soft. The trick of it! So noble a mien, ingratiating vows, Such generosity hiding such fault, Torture me; that, in the recoil of love, I am only bloodthirsty. Armorica? Unfurl on my good ship Prydwen. I will make A memorable example of him. GAWAIN. Set sail.

GAWAIN. Set sail,
Land all among his castles on the coast,
And do it.

ARTHUR. I will pursue. Mordred, look up; Unless thy wounds do cloud thee utterly.

MORDRED. I mend; and wax whole shortly.

ARTHUR. Dost thou so?
What say the surgeons? For on thee I lean.
I do adjure thee, be transparent to me—
Art thou a pier to build on?

MORDRED. Soon, in a month, In a week, a day or so; as for my mind, That is not stricken, at once.

ARTHUR, Cleansed be in thy bones
Any taint of their origin! We devolve
The Pendragon's power in Logris upon Mordred
Created competent, for the interregnum
Of our hosting abroad. Tenderly, sir,
I embrace thee in this trust. For we'll invade
Sir Lancelot's retreat. Queen Gwinever,
Her near future castellate round about,
Entrench her in some love, Mordred, stand by her.
Methinks thou takest it faintly.

MORDRED. Mordred becomes
Thy likeness and thy image. Trust in thyself;
For I will be thyself.

ARTHUR. I ought never
To have suffered it come to this pass. I have been
Backward. Gird on Excalibur, my sword
Covered with cryptic writings in the Erse,
Hastily, lest I weep, lest I denounce

Sworn brotherhood and marriage, as alike Nicknames for perjury.

GAWAIN. Remains revenge!

ARTHUR. More than a brother's love!
Gawain, this dragon coiled upon my helm,
That oft hath on Hengist and Horsa looked—
A toy of battle!—this, in seeming fury
And imitative show of cruelty,
Is as I truly am. I am fearfully stung.
Let the banked oars on the octave billows play
Dead marches toward Brittany. Oh, my wife, my
wife;

Damnable sport!

GAWAIN. My soul kisses thy soul.

ARTHUR. Let me not rail too widely; my once darlings.

Shocking all likelihood, libel flesh and blood, In their offending; there let me not gauge Stature nor portraiture of normal men.

I will not tyrannize in judgment on The seed of man. 'Twere a disease in mind My experience might infect me with, if, swayed By many instances, I cursed the tribe And loins of our initial parents. Never! Though male and female wrong me, I assert

The purity of most.

GAWAIN. Sire.

ARTHUR. Our soil is wholesome.
O Hope pregnant of promise, and prescient Faith
Reclaiming this abandoned garden, plant
Reverence amongst us chiefly, for a stock
Which is the beginning of health; renew, restore,
Sow the ground thick with virtues; and hide up
My wicked industry. Here I stand firm;
Thou, Mordred, canst not backward to thy source,
No more than rivers can.

MORDRED. Build upon me;
I will amaze thee, and be kind to the Queen.
GAWAIN. Beseech your Grace, take meat; after, press on.

(Exeunt Omnes.)

ACT III.

SCENE I.—CORNWALL. WITHIN TINTAGIL CASTLE.

(Enter MARK and ANDRET.)

MARK. King Arthur moves in Brittany?

ANDRET. Yes, royal Sir.

MARK. Sir Lancelot going before?

Why hate we Arthur? Uther Pendragon

Destroyed our father, and his widowed Queen

Our mother married, leaving us King of Cornwall;

So that we and our sister Queen Margause,

Queen to King Lot of Orkney, are thus congenital

With Arthur who is grown illustrious

Wherefore we hate him. But we hate him worst,

For the deep wrong he hath our sister done.

Is our wife home, indeed?

Andret. King Mark, she is; and thy supplanting knight,

Tristan whom I enticed from Joyous-Gard To trust thy goodness. Here is the Queen.

(Enter LA BEALE ISEULT.)

MARK. Iseult,

Love-repast of my famine-wasted frame, La Beale Iseult, my fancy feeds on thee.

ISEULT. Wilt please thee to be kinder to us both, Than heretofore?

MARK. Ye please me, and I am pleased. House-warming is our hest, when now return Our spouse, and well-beloved Tristan. Take, Iseult, take thou this key in thine own hand; Lay it in Tristan's.

(Enter Tristan.)

Oh, assure thee, knight,

This locks our treasury; and this received Pledges our trust in the receiver.

ISEULT. Let not,

Let not this key go from thy hand; my Lord Shows lovingly in this.

MARK. In faith, I do.

ISEULT. We much desired thee here to give it.

TRISTAN. King Mark,

And Queen la Beale Iseult, I take this trust, With simple hearty faith. If treason lurk

Within my bosom, may this piece of steel Whose wards do map out the intricacies And labyrinthine by-ways of thy trust, Be red hot iron in my grasp, to brand The brawn of my thumb for traitor.

MARK. Speak not so far. I have a jewel in my closet locked Of most imperial worth; it is an ouch Rived, I confess it, from my father's tomb In troublous times. The key will give thee way Into its sleeping place. Fetch it, i' faith, That I may make such divination in it-For 'tis a gem to peer into and see Uneared issues ere the field be ploughed Where they shall grow—I have employ for it, In the great question of my throne. Tristan, Thou art my son, because I have no child To reign in Cornwall in the Cambrian chair When I the sitting posture shall disuse For the long lying.

TRISTAN. Far be that from now.

MARK. Fetch me that jewel whence it is enclosed
As pearl in oyster.

TRISTAN. Well I wot of the door.

(Exit.)

MARK. Iseult, give us the place until we call. Our neighbour kingdom doth disturb us much, Sir Mordred being Deputy; and Arthur Loving us little.

ISEULT. Wilt not grace mine eyes
With sight of this same wonder?
MARK. We intend so.
But it is dazzling. Pray you, wait apart.
I'll pin it on thy breast when next we meet.
ISEULT. I long to gaze upon its preciousness.

(Exit.)

And my installing as apparent heir,
As thou foreshadowedst. Now dost thou advance
Tristan unto a place of inward trust,
Whose striking down, ere thou enjoy thy Queen
In any positive quiet, is no less
Than most imperative.

MARK. All this is true.

Andret. Then are thy acts and thy intents at war

Or in appearance only?

MARK. Cousin Sir Andret,
I love a secret not when it is shared.
But, for thy more contentment, bethink thee;
In that same happy clime where the Fisher King
Sits on seven hilltops, they have such a power
To scent a rose with death, that the perfume
Is as a snare to make men snuff up that
Which snuffs them out; they there have poisoned rings,
And apples halved with knives which leave half wholesome

To feed the profferer, but the taint of the other, From the other side of the same knife, destroys In guise of friendship.

Andret. If my Lord's device Deal thus with Tristan, it is very good; For never hath Sir Tristan dealt with thee Under an open brow; but the worst wrong Was underneath a smile.

MARK. I have dressed him now In his own recipe. Do but observe His face how ghastly, his huge limbs how frail.

(Re-enter TRISTAN.)

TRISTAN. Where are my people? Oh, abhorred King!

of trust, ot yare, r's fang, t caitiff forged the thee? p gave to me this hay she wish, wed hers, out-face. y nrsed key. d words

Beguiled thy Queen, and more beguiled myself, She will forgive; while this incredible Iscult of Erin so punishes me For wrongs I do in dotage on herself. My people, ho! My ship, for Brittany, Where my chaste wife, Iseult of the White Hand, pines, Iseult of Brittany, not la Beale Iseult. For Brittany! Launch forth for Brittany!

(Exit.)

Post to Prince Mordred. Tristan's strong restraint

Is off my collar, which made me, perforce, King Arthur's friend. But Mordred now proclaims Himself as Logris; and ourself will stand Godfather to his uttermost design. Bid him be bold, sudden and treacherous: And I will go beyond him in all these. I'll meet him by appointment, day and place; And rid our neighbourhood of Arthur's grace.

(Exit with Andret.)

SCENE II.—CAMELOT. BEFORE THE GREAT HALL.

(Enter DAGONET and DINADAN.)

DINADAN. How my Lord Prince Mordred hatches out majesty, and flaps his wings in Camelot. He begins freely; and sovran it is for a green wound, ever the sweep of the butler's wand for more and yet costlier vintage; empty mazars made excuses for full ones; and their filling as good reason for their emptying.

DAGONET. Sir Dinadan, prithee let us back to our thesis of the week before last.

DINADAN. But that King Arthur is superseded and dethroned—

DAGONET. There I will maintain it, against the stomach of the new court, thus:—Sir Dinadan, I would have thee to wit, sufficing hunger and thirst degradeth a noble art. To feed by necessity is profanation; but to cloy the appetite is culinary

suicide. Between beggarly enough and lordly overmuch is the golden mean of discreet, maidenly taste. This is too little studied.

DINADAN. Wine of race, Osaye or Algarde, or sweet Malvoisie; these are fair salves for an open sore.

DAGONET. Sir Mordred was more frightened than hurt.

DINADAN. It was at most but a flesh wound. Hard names but no bones broken. But, oh! these revels, will they never end? They grow into the night, and the night into the day, like the serpent of eternity with his tail in his mouth. But, Sir Dagonet, these letters from over sea, specifying that King Arthur is slain in battle with Sir Lancelot, are they, think you, verity, or caused to be made to that effect?

DAGONET. Caused to be made to that effect. But what matter for that? A tinsel shaving is as good as a minnow, if your jack swallow it. These knights so gulled to give Mordred the crown, cannot take it back again.

DINADAN. King Arthur could never receive them into his peace, or would ever after have a sinister eye upon them. So hath Mordred friends.

DAGONET. A man risen, or a man fallen, hath no !

friends; envy covereth the one, and contempt the other. Besides, if thou wouldst explore and search out friendship, Sir Lancelot was King Arthur's friend.

DINADAN. Well, Sir Mordred is all his mother's and more. As for this fifteen days' feast, this crowning of himself, these joustings and tournaments, hundreds of knights unhorsed daily, now is the common voice that with King Arthur was none other life but war and contention; but with Sir Mordred is great joy and bliss.

DAGONET. As it was in the beginning, is now—for many there be that King Arthur hath made up of nought and given them lands, now may not say of him a good word.

DINADAN. The people are ever new-fangled.

DAGONET. And King Mark's army coming from Cornwall to Mordred's strengthening is a strong argument for the devotion of cowards.

DINADAN. The crown of Logris shall duck and bob to Cambria for this.

DAGONET. Ay, and pay tribute; four and twenty damosels a year, all richly beseen. It is a noble prince, a popinjay. Here it is, on the strut.

DINADAN. Can it peck, think you?

DAGONET. Ay, peck its father's eyes out.

DINADAN. I have aforetime flouted King Mark, and made a villainous lay of him. He oweth me a grudge there.

DAGONET. And I once horribly affrighted Sir Kai Mordred, casing myself in Sir Lancelot's armour, and, in that shape, coursed him for miles; amongst other such fleers against him. Have you not heard raised the "hue and cry"; and the thief cry with it, to turn pursuit upon the wind? We must shuffle off our incautious jests, make them traditional, father them upon our forefathers. But mark you, Sir Mordred is no frog-spawn; let him feast as he will, he shall prove a very terrible winged dragon. There is a valour that is abstemious, and will stand a siege; but the full flagon hath here a soldier in it. (Enter Mordred and Gwinever, with La Damosel

(Enter Mordred and Gwinever, with LA Damosei Sauvage and Others attendant.)

GWINEVER. What is thy gilded pleasure now? MORDRED. Pleasure?

Stick roses in all ears, clap garlands on Every man's head. We will be gay as flies That wanton in the golden sunbeam. Dagonet, Do execution on some word, torture it, Till it confess a meaning unsuspect.

DAGONET. To give an instance, Gwinever, Jeune vie

Intendeth young life; and a light o' love Is the light of love.

MORDRED. Here is a crown for thee.

DAGONET. And thy father's crown on thee.

DINADAN. Thy trenchermen,

With mouths wet as the questing hound's, snuff up

The steam thy anointed cooks fling noseward.

DAGONET.

Dinner

Is the blossom of the day; breakfast the bud Which coyly peeps upon the bashful dawn. Wit, with her sallies, lives on the influence

Of goblets and good cheer, not on a fast Nor over-feeding with the dullard. Nurse The offspring of the brain on delicate cates,

Lest it shall fall the leaner.

Mordred.

We have dined

Already to-day.

DINADAN. Yet let bygones be bygones, and dine again.

DAGONET. Or, if thou hast dined well, mend it with better.

MORDRED. A counsel of perfection.

DAGONET. Keep counsel, Sire.

MORDRED. Well, our best sauce be wit; hunger will come.

In, to the banqueting, minstrels before.

Serve every guest on gold, and everyone
Carry his platter home with him; beaten gold
Embossed with carbuncles; let our scullions
Wash nothing up; we'll give our dishes away
With what is on them. Go before us.

DAGONET.

Backwards!

Keeping our mouths wide open toward your Grace. Oh! shall they gobble up dishes and all?

Gold buys us meat, and meat buys gold in hall.

There's interchange in use of life and meat; Some eat to live, while others live to eat.

Damosel Sauvage. I'll cap thee there, or cannot draw my glove;

Some love to live, while others live to love.

(Exeunt All but Mordred, Gwinever and LA DAMOSEL SAUVAGE.)

MORDRED. Which is thy tune?

GWINEVER. What wouldst thou have in me?

Decorous widowhood? What, unto me,

Was regal downfall from a King so cold,

Friendship was more passionate? Shall I weep,

And blot these sheets that tell me Arthur lies Colder than life, earth to earth? The tale here

Is likely, as penned; yet, for all that is here,

Beshrew me, but I think that thou hast cozened Intelligence, packing it full of lies; And Arthur is not fallen. If I wept, It were for Lancelot exiled, which tears Deserved well thoughts malicious.

MORDRED. Thou dost well, Honourably and wisely too, giving fair smiles And becks to fortune when she looks thy way.

GWINEVER. I care not if these letters counterfeit; I am but as Queen Dowager, be Arthur Of the quick or dead.

MORDRED. That is a pale decrease
From thy large empiry. Consort thou wast;
And wilt thou wane to less? Let me speak lower.
The Kingdom of Logris and the glory thereof
Is brightly on my head. Canst thou divine
A dearer sharing than Arthur conceived?
Thou shalt not be Queen Dowager past to-day;
Nor shrink thy fancy to a narrower see
Than Logris is. Dost thou catch at the sense
That glistens in my speaking? Thou shalt not
Be curtailed dowager, disowned wife, discarded
Mistress. My sceptre hath as wide a sweep
As my father's. Wilt thou again be Queen,
Queen in hall, Queen in bower, Queen, I say Queen?

I'll revel for thee, fight for thee, die for thee, Sin for thee, worship thee, make thee Queen by my side;

Queen of the Britons once again.

GWINEVER.

Speak plainly.

MORDRED.

There is darkness in my soul

That I grope childishly. What I would have

Is Arthur's right in thee.

GWINEVER. Speak plainer yet.

Thou desirest in marriage me who am

Thy sire's relict?

MORDRED. I do.

GWINEVER.

It is a folly

To think on even.

Mordred.

Then we'll not think on it,

Before 'tis done.

GWINEVER. King Arthur's only child,
Whither are we carried and washed about?
Shipwreck and thunder-striking are but things
Small in comparison. What dost thou urge?
Make suit to be hanged or damned, never to realize
This abhorred project.

MORDRED. Thou madest a second choice; why not a third?

Arthur and Lancelot age somewhat. Thou art young,

And better poised with me. Let grizzled hair Presume not to mix silver with gold, making Baser alloy. Lusty of limb, we were Two lovers, Emperor and Empress. GWINEVER. Men judge Us fallen women so. Taken in the act, No denial of it, that we cannot be true To any man is assumed; we are light things Given to this wind, that wind, and the other wind Which bloweth any way; so are we set down, I and my sister walkers of the dark, In the tried, grave experience of mankind. But 'tis not so at all. The cruelty of it! Hast thou no awe, sirrah, that thou hast surprised A Oueen's tears?

MORDRED. Thou art but tenant at will In Lancelot; in Arthur thou hast no place. Thou art a lack-land, with never a man To call thine own. Ambition and desire Are woman's gods. I offer both.

DAMOSEL SAUVAGE (To GWINEVER). Power rests In Mordred's hands.

GWINEVER. Necessity woos hard.

I will not be hurried to it, though I am moved.

Time is not fit. Let me go furnish me

Against my second wedding-day; if needs must.

MORDRED. It shall be, and delightfully.

GWINEVER. Fear not

My zeal nor my goodwill. I must ransack

The chests of my palace. I would wear on my head

The she-coronet of Britain, balancing

Thy wreath of gems. Besides, I must better me

With a thousand and one gauds we add to ourselves,

We women, to magnify us in the eyes of men;

Or, as some say, to spite others of our own sex;

Nothings; I know not what; yet showing a touch

Which speaks us queenly. I will return, anon.

Wait for me, bridegroom.

MORDRED. Thou art deceiving me; A work which is thy special calling; thou art Radiant with falsehood in thy glorious eyes.

GWINEVER. Thou wrong'st me. But let me be provident here,

That I may go the gayer.

MORDRED. By noon, King Mark, With power and armament, should be here. His trump Speaks to our gate-house, la!

(Trumpet.)

GWINEVER. King Mark shall grace
Our nuptials excellently, and shall praise

My bold compliance. Thanked be the Almighty Purpose
I have no progeny of my guilt, if thou
Be typical of beginnings ill. (Aside.)
MORDRED. Stint not
To satisfy the outlook of men's eyes
In choice attire.

GWINEVER. To thee I frame myself. Damosel, go, use thy activity.

(Exit LA DAMOSEL SAUVAGE.)

Upon our intimate history I look back;
Margause, once broken loose, by leaps and bounds,
Plunged, with Sir Lamorake, in luxury
Fineless. And who shall say she mistook her path?
Her steps lead ours!

(Exit.)

MORDRED. This mounts me to the throne,
Where I but stood on the footstool. Hail, King Mark!
(Enter Mark and Andret, attended.)

Welcome from Cornwall, Cambria.

MARK. Deserving prince,
Whose merit should be unclouded, are not we
Thy restorative? We will illumine thee,
Despite the kicks and envious slurs of time.
We look to shake the Pendragon of Britain
Out of his seat, perhaps, making fair Cornwall

Pre-emment over Logris. This our cousin Andret, our chief knight, makes our chivalry whole In round numbers.

Andret. Propose to me, Sir Knight,
Supererogatory honour; it shall be
My measured duty. Let our valour make
Our quarrel good; then let who dare arraign
The soundness of our pleas; they shall be proof
In the eyes of admiration. Thou dost breathe,
I am sure, for the acquiring of renown
In prowess only.

MORDRED. Mock me not, noble Sir. True, I would live

Something magnificently, not without
Apparent greatness; yet my cadence gives
The community's blazon of bastard—
Incestuous bastardy it is, mark you—
Why should I venerate the Idol Fame,
Who am a thing yeaned to contempt? I would taste
Feasts, riches, pleasure and that liberty
Of aweless power when desire's full excess
Puts it to sleep. Sirs, in my father's Queen
I intend to lay the pillars of my throne
More strongly than in shifts of war; which yet
I will not neglect. Thus I propose forthwith

To marry her.

ANDRET. That should be brought about, If it be possible.

MORDRED. She met me half way; And goes to pre-figure in her proper person The image of our state. That is, she robes, Now while we speak, against the solemn act Of our great union. Royal Cambria, thou Who hold'st in tenure of us Cornwall and Wales. Shalt henceforth own none higher than King Mark; Yea, shear a slice from Logris, for this aid, Large enough to content thee. Meantime, rest, No care disquieting; another day, Glancing beyond what's in the foreground set For toil immediate, as more distantly, We'll tell our dreams to make our reign of note For heathenness expelled the land, despite Foul coming in, and climbing; but this evening Joy shall crown joy. Strike on the dulcimers, Ye giddy ministers of minstrelsy; While bluster swallows up my father's time, Energy and resourceful purpose, music Make glad our ears; for we will slumber on Our trophied ensigns, till the alarum demand Our worthy rearing of them! 'Twere churl's welcome,

Uncle, to lodge you in your tent.

(Re-enter DINADAN.)

What, sirrah?

DINADAN. Let me speak out of character, without tags of my humour as a professed scoffer and railer.

MARK. We know thou art emulous to be thought a fool.

MORDRED. I will think better of thy wit than of Dagonet's, if thou wilt let me.

DINADAN. Departed not Queen Gwinever this, but now?

MORDRED. Of a surety. She retires to array herself after our mind, imperially.

DINADAN. Yes, yes; I can conceive her now sweeping to and fro, before her mirrors, while her handmaids hold them up; or spreading her train, thus. Her Grace is attiring herself; keeps safe from interruption; it is a fortified adorning.

'MORDRED. How so, enigmatical coxcomb?

DINADAN. She hath flung herself into Joyous-Gard, rattled down the portcullis, and defies a siege, while she paints her eyelids.

MORDRED. Curst sport! Will she be wooed hardily? "Fortified" quotha? She shall be my Queen upon my throne. With full consent to it, she

left me here, for purveying of household stuffs and caparisons, toward the event. What say'st, fortified? By the mass, you tickle me! Sirrah, she shall array herself like Balkis of Sheba, for my delight. Pratest thou? Heads-a-penny, the skies are falling. Is she fortified against me? A widow's fortification that but steadies my devotion; a pretty sport, sooth. But she desires, and shall share my throne.

DINADAN (Aside). I marvelled at her imbecility till I find your Lordship's greater imbecility makes hers wise.

MORDRED. Sirs, we will reduce this fortification, ere Arthur show in the offing. It is a woman's nay-say, a spice to her consenting.

MARK. Fools marry, fools marry!

MORDRED. I will be a fool then, in this.

DINADAN (Aside). Thou art, in thought and in deed.

MORDRED. My kingdom is thy kingdom. We will beat King Arthur from the shore. We must compass this, or we are not whole, neither in heart nor place.

DINADAN (Aside). She will wed the pestilence, ere she will be Queen of Logris again.

MORDRED. To our best of entertainment, my

Lord and Lords, be toward. We will review our numbers.

(Exeunt Mordred, Mark, Andret and All attendant.)

DINADAN. Sweet Sir Dagonet.

(Re-enter DAGONET.)

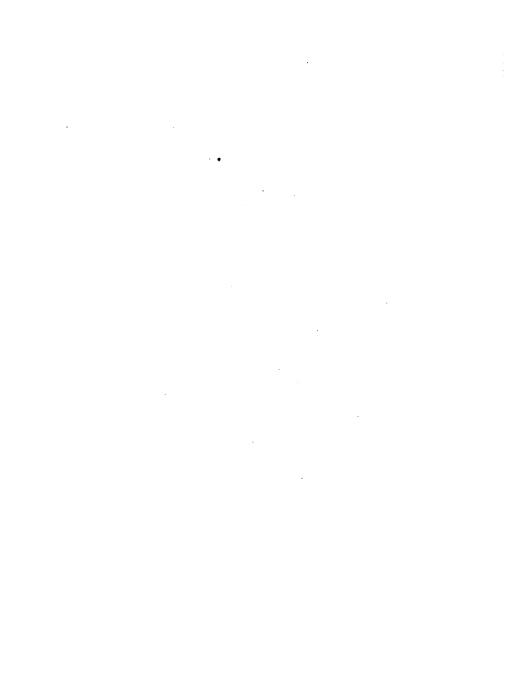
This prince will put Beelzebub to school, if he live. But save Sir Gawain's wife alone, believe me, there is no clean thing in Camelot; and she loves her own way above all things in heaven or earth; so no wonder if men prefer the wear of an easier garment.

DAGONET. Your male creature is not tetchy. Your man is well satisfied to bask in contentment, and let his neighbour go; but a good woman cannot rest till she hath made every one about her uneasy. The lilies of the field, were they in better case than King Solomon, an if they had his wives?

DINADAN. This is something out of the relevant. But Mordred Pendragon and la Damosel Gwinever; what thinkest?

DAGONET. Nay, I have foresworn thought for foolery.

(Exeunt together.)



ACT IV.

SCENE I .- CORNWALL. WITHIN TINTAGIL CASTLE.

(Enter LA BEALE ISEULT.)

ISEULT. O ye clouds, gather up your skirts and run With me and the wind over to Gaul in a trice, To the mainland of Brittany. Here is scripture Indicting of a goodly matter. The ink Heart's blood. This would conjure to life the dead Though three months laid in charnels. This blinds me,

This blinds me with seeing. I hear Tristan's voice In every word he writes here. Calls he to me? Pleads he to deaf ears? Yet he wounds, he wounds, He wounds me mortally. Can he suspect, Put faith and belief upon it that I, Iseult, Was privy to his poisoning? Torture, torture, That he hath blackened vellum with it. The word Shrivels the parchment up; the ink is black

ENDRAGON et me re-read, sense, h it came but now, tany he is. Iseult of Erin, and a-dying of my poisoned tly, and heal me, as ght thee the healing of ave been false to thee, me? I know not. g of the wound, these Hadst thou a hand hen, as so oft, shaft's e tongue do it, visible hand, arry, who I false? Must I needs fess, what absolution? de thee; but my wife, ear to me; day and

KING ARTHUR PENDRAGON night in my old wanderings, she haunted me; and

the love of thy name made her lovely to me; thus we wed. Hate me, if thou wilt, for it; avenge thyself on me, for thou canst, for it; and let me die unholpen; yet come to me. Forgive, if thou art divine; but come, as thou art human. Strengthen me that I may accord King Arthur with Sir Lancelot of the Lake. With many fell battles have they stricken one another here. Let me arise and couple up them twain, and accord their difference. In no other way can the realm rise again from under the heel of Sir Mordred. For Mordred, in their dissension and debate, hath sown a crop. Let me arise and blight it for him in the ground. I lie here as it were in chains of brass upon this bed of sickness. Loosen my fetters; free me to this last emprise that shall brighten my dim honour with an abiding glory. Let me restore the Round Table in King Arthur's hall. Heal me; forgive me; love me; glorify me. Yours in life and death, and now in Brittany. Tristan. This note. When mine henchman brings thee these, if thou return with him, bend a white sail on thy yard-arm, If thou come not, his charge is his every stitch of canvas shall be black as coal, unto my burial,"

Let Arthur and Sir Lancelot blow away
Like chaff before the fan, like summer dust;
What to me are their battles? Heal thee, Tristan;
Heal thee? Succour thee? Yes. Forgive thee wholly?

Perhaps in time, perhaps not. But heal thee!—
Brangoene! my handmaiden, Brangoene, what!—
King Mark hath left Tintagil and myself
To be companions, while, with all his knights,
He wars in Logris, on Sir Mordred's hand
Against King Arthur. Here I am alone
With my resolves, to stay or to depart.—
Brangoene, Brangoene! where art, where art thou,
child?—

Spread to the landwind, to the north-easterly air,
Sailcloth milk-white as cliffs of Albion,
Ye ship-boys and mariners. Lonely halls,
I possess you but to give you away.
What saith the letter? "The white witch"? That
speaks

The blameless practice of an innocent art.

My mother was a sorceress of knowledge

To shake the moon, yea, play the barber on

The wandering comets, robbing their countenances

Of their red beards. She hath gathered fern-seed,

And distilled essences of virtuous flowers. Stopped in cruses of Lybian alabaster, Which I have by me; and am something learned In practice of their operant purposes For worse or better. Now will I choose a vial From among them, and salve my dying lord With the inspiring ointment that it holds; For death, smelling the savour, will away; It is so far from his corruption, That he abhors it thoroughly, it being spiced With simples delicate, gracious and rare. Tristan embalmed so, I will restore To shield King Arthur and, enchanting me, Carry me home to the land of Lyoness. I quit my loathed lord, evil King Mark, For my adored Lord of love, forgiven His doubt; forgiven his marriage otherwhere— Brangoene!—Launch, launch, into the bay; Saddle my sea-horse; tackle the mast With mainsail white as mother-o'-pearl. Bound, ship, as a hunted stag, while the wind gives tongue, Following us from Tintagil.—Brangoene! (Exit.)

SCENE II.—Armorica. By the Seashore.

(Enter NIMUE, MORGAN LA FAY and all the other LADIES OF THE LAKE.)

NIMUE. Nimue calls, both far and nigh, Over sand banks high and dry, By broad and narrow, sound and shallow Where the waves wallow, Leave your haunted floods, and follow Me, anon, Ladies of Avillon. I who rocked Sir Lancelot's cradle Call ye who sang lullaby Round his pillow. Did we not swaddle Arthur in our nursery? ALL THE OTHER QUEENS. Ay! NIMUE. Let us land Where the bowered rocks are spanned Over water or winnowed sand

By the wind fanned; Here, where Druid altars stand Upon crags on either hand, Poised by the wand Of Merlin, on the Armoric strand. Here Lancelot, albeit loth, Here where the leap-frog surges leap, Meets Arthur and Sir Gawain both Who, gathering wrath, Follow over the hollow deep, Over rough, over smooth. They have drawn him from out of his keep-ALL. Sir Lancelot, Sir Lancelot! Escarped i' the air, wall, tower and moat. ALL. Sir Lancelot! NIMUE. King Arthur and his knights, I wot, Draw Lancelot afield with taunt on taunt, Taunt upon taunt; till, front to front, He checks them, blazoned shield to shield, With push of levelled lances held. Morgan La Fay. Very soon shall we be spelled To the King Who if—say'th Morgan la Fay !—he fling Excalibur to us, that shall bring Us about him, wary and wild.

We and the swallow are on the wing, Over the fallow, under the thorn Where we sip butter-milk in a ram's horn, Dreaming dreams; and music make.

All. We are the Ladies of the Lake! (Alarums. Exeunt Omnes.)

(Alarums continued. Enter ARTHUR and GAWAIN with Forces.)

ARTHUR. Or Lancelot or nought.

GAWAIN. It shall be he:

His portals as from bud to blossom bursting, At last he dares the open.

ARTHUR. Nothing let hold
To part us, ramp nor convex shield, no duty,
No strained regard of knightly devoir, nought;
But bosom unto bosom, closing on,
Deracinate my pangs.

GAWAIN. Give but the word.

Sweep down on him, from the precipitous heights

Which fold yon gorge about.

ARTHUR. Wise magistrates, Ye incorruptible judges, O ye hills Whence I shall post, O ye wise magistrates, Uphold the just cause even of an unjust man.

(Exeunt Omnes.)

(Enter Lancelot, Bors, Urre, Lavain and Forces.)
Bors. Thou sparest him who spareth never thee;
Then turn'st the cheek, he plucketh out the beard
Thy evermore-renowned tenderness
Profits thee to no favour, an he may
Handle thee. Lord uncle, thy friends are shent,
For thy courtesy; the other part renders
A churl's answer unto it.

LAVAIN. Peerless peer,
Father in chivalry of us all, thou hast
Among thy cousins, kinsfolk and other
Of this thy principality, Armoric lords,
Knights sprung of Kings' blood, that faint, droop and
pine,

Hiding in holes, who, openly, made the foe Repent his landing on this cape of Gaul, Which, like a warren burrowed out and safe, Is locked in strongholds; but shall we not think Bulwarks are craven subterfuges?

URRE. My Lord,
We murder our own cause, then try the case.
Their battle bursts upon us where we stand
Undone with complimenting.

LANCELOT. Which way it goes
I understand. Knights, good friends and my kin,

Howso ye see chances and terrible change,
Forbear King Arthur in the press; and leave
Gawain to me. They force their laying out,
Upon my hands. Fain kept I within walls
Yea, being victor, as if vanquished, took
A treaty of my liege; for better is
Peace than for ever war. But, brethren in arms,
We stand upon good ward.
(Enter Arthur, Gawain, Bedevere, Lucan and
Forces.)

LANCELOT. Retire thyself;
Or peril's in this ground, Sir Gawain.
(Exeunt Gawain, Bedevere, Lucan and Forces,
driven before Lancelot's Power.)

ARTHUR.

Oh, heavens,

Excalibur, my sword Excalibur,

Damn this man at once!

LANCELOT. I put thy stroke aside;

And suffer thy cruel words.

(Bors, Urre and Lavain fell Arthur.)
Bors. The need of this;

My Lord, my Lord, the need of this! Shall I Finish this war?

LANCELOT. Shorten your hands! Touch not My Lord Arthur. Upon pain of thy head,

Be not so hardy, nephew mine. King Arthur, In that self place thou laidst my knighthood on, My shoulder tingleth, that we have any Spiteful fashion in meeeting. (Raises Arthur.)

Arthur. Slay me; it were

Thy part of wisdom; plunge in, to the hilt;
Tear out my heart, now, while I am in the vice.
The fleshly tablet where thy name once was
Written by thine own finger, let perfect
Thy ravage on. For safety, pull down flat
The house thou hast unroofed; lest it fall on thee
In a high wind.

Lancelor. Show me this mercy yet,
To lay not thy death on my spear-point. Knights,
Divide yourselves; make way. From the rearward,
lead

The best horse that I have, not good enough For such a rider's use.

ARTHUR. Cadaverous shape
Of beauty, thou thing, lovely and horrible!
Thou canst make me be sorry; make me be mocked
Wrong me with kindness on the top of wrong,
Till I am called thy debtor; show me to be
Vindictive, which I am not; yet will I
Never relent; nor in dissolving time

Soften to facile tolerance.—For Arthur, up, Ye my hosts of Logris!—There is no peace to make In that path where thou hast trespassed and art lost Even to our understanding; there is one King Only forgiving; not a King on earth, Who is a husband.

(Exit.)

BORS. We have done foolishly
LANCELOT. So foolishly,
That we must do more foolishly. Are we not
Victorious, glorious; and the outlook
Deadly to the opposed who will fight, I know it?
Yet once more to try speech.

(Re-enter Arthur, Gawain, Bedevere, Lucan and Forces.)

Attend, listen,

My sometime lovers. I pray you, put your swords Into their scabbards; put them to bed. These months I have held my hand, letting you work despite Up to my very gates and towers. To-day, Our third collision after I come forth, Our horses have gone over fetlocks in Blood for it.

GAWAIN. Sir Lancelot, although we swam, Breasting the flood, yea, tossed the scarlet stream

Vermilion on their necks, all's but a type Of Gareth's piteous bleeding. I will bathe Deeper.

ARTHUR. Address we our battle to these men's Ultimate worsting, who talk so. I will Call it not vengeance; though old Adam mar The calm of punishment.

Lancelot. Ponder it well;
I have forborne you, over half a year;
My friends think, slept too long. Putting aside
Sir Gawain's cousinship with thee, I have proved
The measure of him, that his worst cannot
Greatly hurt me, if I have ado with him;
But he will have both hands full of me.

GAWAIN. We babble
An airy language, puffing ourselves up.
My brethren's revengeable death, answer thou that.

LANCELOT. Is war the welcome that Armorica Must give you, sith ye will none other? Ye Invoke my might with power.

GAWAIN. I do. Let strife
Stand awestruck while we engage. For I contain
The passion of a host within my lungs
To avenge my brother.

LANCELOT. Ha, Sir! More than enough

Is Gawain of Orkney. Whichever of us fall, This, without oath, let a plain man make clear, Of Gareth's blood I am cleanly innocent; For that I did intend to him no wrong, But so far other, loved him. Only I pray, In the accidental lottery, as may hap,—
For who is master of each incident?—
My inability prove not my disgrace.

(LANCELOT and GAWAIN fight.)

ARTHUR (Aside). Our ancient kingdom weeps blood.
This man was

An earthly god, almost, in mine eyes; now, lo, Mordred is our cynosure, who gilds over All detriment with latter worth.

LANCELOT.

Ha. Prince

My Lord Sir Gawain, now I sensibly feel
That thou art spent. Now must I do my part,
For great and grievous strokes have I, this day,
Endured of you with pain. (Cuts him down.)

GAWAIN. By thy knighthood,
Finish. Wherefore withdrawest thou thyself?
Turn again, traitor knight, and stab me, slay me.
For an thou leave me gored, when I am whole,
I will do battle with thee again.

LANCELOT.

So far

I shall make answer, by the grace of God.

I never smote felled knight yet, nor will not.

GAWAIN. Fight on, fight on, fight, Sirs—fight over me.

Lancelot. Now have good day, my Lord the King. Be sure

Under these walls, upon this craggy coast,
Ye win no worship. An I brought out my knights
Wherewith my strong places are doubly strong,
Sevenfold replete, proud of their overplus,
Then should many a man die. Better,
My Lord King, you remember of old kindness.
Yet, howsoever I fare, heaven be your guide
In all places.

(Exit, with Bors, URRE, LAVAIN and FORCES.)
ARTHUR. Gentle cousin, Sir Knight,
What cheer, Sir Gawain? Look we not miserable?
Would Lancelot hurl against me like a man,
I bore his wrong less heavily.

GAWAIN.

I am

Over-matched.

BEDEVERE. Sire, here cometh in the field A drooping pilgrimage where, trailed on the ground, Sir Tristan's banner lifts the troubled dust; And a fair damosel who wrings her hands

Walks, like a widow, by the moving bed That bears—as I descry him now—Tristan Laid sickly on it.

(Enter Tristan, borne on a litter, and Iseult or the White Hand.)

ARTHUR.

Sir Tristan it is.

ISEULT OF THE WHITE HAND. King, I am that Iseult of Brittany,

Deserted wife, but to be widow soon.

Is not this my husband, and la Beale Iseult

Nothing at all? He is mine, but to be lost;

Given me, to be snatched away; alive, to die.

TRISTAN. I am full of poison; but, O gracious King,

More full of poisonous news. The news is to thee.

ARTHUR. What is the burden of the untoward hour That curses all of us?

ISEULT OF THE WHITE HAND. Woe-begone King, even thus my maiden troth

Comes back to me, landing on my demesne.

And he is like a love-letter torn up

And scorched with fire. Poison is working here.

TRISTAN. Administered—can it be possible That woman born should do it?—by her I loved Out of all warranty; yea, I suspect

Not Mark alone, but Queen la Beale Iseult, To have me from her path, now I am stale, Hath stalled me thus.

ARTHUR. Oh, fiend; if it be so! There's not a sink Below lust's possibility; I know, To our most dear experience.

Tristan. Mark is free

By my destruction; Mordred is risen

In a most sacrilegious league with Mark:

He hath seized thy throne, King Arthur; and thy Queen

Will, to his wishes and embrace, compel In marriage most unholy.

ARTHUR. Bottomless hell,

I have plumbed thee at last! Mordred my flesh!

Oh! that accursed fatherhood is worse

Than friendship's treachery, and a wife's treachery,

And a kingdom's revolt. Oh, treachery!

Am I not at the worst; or have I more

Discoveries to make? I am listening.

BEDEVERE. My Lord, it much behoves us, instantly, Almost by magic for speed, almost by aid Of diabolical means, we make Logris.

ARTHUR. No moment must be lost upon the road. What will become of thee?

Tristan. Anything, nothing. I am here in good hands. I have to do With my wife's motherland of Brittany.

ARTHUR. Sweet Knight, adieu. Commend me, as I thee.

Mordred, is't so? Doth he attempt my Queen? That is beyond belief. Nothing transcends The infinite ravin of sin that newly invents Extravagant wickednesses. So I find. And my belief must credit what I hear. But this is past belief. Art thou quite sure Mordred fulfils himself to such a thing Unprecedented, search our annals out? Yea, I begot him scarce if any way More virtuously than this.

GAWAIN. I had a thought
I was immovable with wounds, methought
That I was stunned with blows, before this tale.
Now am I stunned indeed; yet will I up!
Alas, that we have made Sir Lancelot foe!
Our folly's its own scourge. Back as we came;
And our good tackle fail us not in the wind.
Help me on to my feet.

ARTHUR (To TRISTAN and ISEULT). Most gentle Knight,

يفا

And lady who illumest this bleak shore,
Find out some haven. Gawain, is ribaldry
The authentic word for man? Wanton and liar
Describe our race. To Logris, Logris, Logris!
(Exeunt Arthur, Gawain, Bedevere, Lucan and
Forces.)

TRISTAN. King of grief!
No further on, mute bearers; not a step more;
Here, on this headland whose druidical stones
Are ruin on ruin heaped and witness left

Of years whose habitants are dead, lay me Sacrificially.

(Exeunt Bearers.)

ISEULT OF THE WHITE HAND. Thine eyelids droop;

And thy large limbs compose themselves to rest. Oh, leave me not as yet. Fall not asleep, Fall not asleep.

TRISTAN. Fain would I keep mine eyes
Ope toward the sea that laves these sundered shores
Of Brittany and Britain. I cannot do it,
For heaviness on their lids. But look thou forth,
An thou lovest me. The Queen la Beale Iseult—
Nay, hate her not too much—hath a strange power,
Descendant from her mother who commingled

That cup which blasted us.—Nay, start not, love; I curse the cup and her. But there's one hope Even in the bottom of this well of death, Wherein I drown. If but la Beale Iseult Will, she can brew an antidote to clear This gathering darkness from me.

ISEULT OF THE WHITE HAND. Can she give life.

Or dispossess inheriting death?

ground, and watch.

TRISTAN.

Verily. I have sent express to her. If she send health, Or come with it in her hand—look out to sea— I charged my mariners bend on the yard A snow-white sail; but an if she send not. Denying me, wishing me die the death, Then shall be set a coal-black sail to flap Heavily on the mast as any pall. Look forth, across you green and moving plain Where ships go; tell me what there lives afloat. ISBULT OF THE WHITE HAND. I will take bigher

TRISTAN. Ab, me! Am I the prop, the buttress, the strong fence Preserving Arthur? I am a broken reed Lying upon the shore of Brittany.

ISEULT OF THE WHITE HAND. A sail! It flashes white, white to the heavens,

And wafts the Irish Princess hither (Aside). A sail!

TRISTAN. Is't black or white?

ISEULT OF THE WHITE HAND (Aside). White as they call my hands; but dare I watch

His joy that she comes to him?

Tristan. White is't ?—or black?

ISEULT OF THE WHITE HAND (To TRISTAN). The sail is black; black as a funeral,

Blacker than treason; other none I see.

TRISTAN. La Beale Iseult was privy to my bane, And will not save me. Earth, receive my clay. I unswathe my wound, and let the kinder air Kiss frozenly. (Dies.)

ISBULT OF THE WHITE HAND. No pity left for me?

So went the wife, and looked across the surge; And saw the white sail glisten in the sun; And lied to him she loved. One sail I spy Blacker than treason; and at the word he sank, Slain by the wife he wronged, not hand on sword As best beseemeth knight of Table Round, But slain by her who loved him.

(Enter LA BEALE ISEULT.)
Thou art too late;

Queenly voyager, pirate I call thee, Robbing me of husband, having one thyself.

LA BEALE ISEULT. O mortal prison, let my immortal love

Out of me. Tristan, O mine own! (Dies.)

ISEULT OF THE WHITE HAND. We both
Are named Iseult. Booty and spoil ye are,
Tristan of Lyoness and la Beale Iseult,
More terrible wasters of earth than savage bears
For all ye are beautiful. As for the wife,—
For me the wife, and my white hands, for me,
For me the darkness where seamews around
These teeth of rock, these needles of rock, scream,
Loud as the Lost. Night, quickly-dropping night,
Blots out particulars. For me, the dark!

(Exit.)

(Re-enter Lancelot, with Bors, Urre, Lavain and other of his Knights.)

LANCELOT. Like to a city after plague, whence

But helpless wretches but take wing, all round The field is deserted; those alone remain Who can no other. Knights of Armorica,

Gather indifferently friend and foe
Laid here recumbent, stricken less or more,
To my castle; no soul but I have pledged
At Camelot feasts. I try to hope we have broken
The wing of Arthur's wrath; and that he intends
No more vexation to us. What is here?
These are not of the battle's harvest. Look!
We know these twain so well. How they came
hither,

Nor of what sickness, what mischances, stricken, Know nought. Lay them in graves furrowed somewhat

Apart; for they were never wed; and we
Ought to hold that marriage is sacred. Plant
Over the one a brier, and a rose
On the other; that the trailers catch across
And, perhaps, make one thicket of it. This knight,
This king of hunters, best since Nimrod rode
Before the Lord, this player on the harp, more
skilled

Than harper sithen Israel's psalmist, held The bridle rein on Cambria, who fallen asleep, I much foredread what follows. To Logris, And with a quick remove, I must return, For now I am certain in this knight's demise,

This control taken off, Mordred in Logris—
What may not Mark and Mordred make there?
Bors,
Look forth, if Arthur be for peace or no,
Or what is now to do. Take up these twain.
(Exeunt Omnes: the dead bodies of Tristan and
LA Beale Iseult carried.)

ACT V.

SCENE I .- JOYOUS-GARD. BEFORE THE CASTLE.

(Enter Mordred, Mark, Dagonet, Dinadan and Forces, besieging.)

MORDRED. How Usk, the shameless wanton, doth beslubber,

In passing, yonder osiered fortilage, Yon eyot armed, where, a gay bachelor, I trip and go about.

MARK. Such passing clasp
Our wives extend to us. We shall reduce
This moated Joyous-Gard scarce ere the King
Come up.

MORDRED. Before or after. Once again Will I speak with the Queen, ere she suppose The siege raised for her.

MARK. We have stopped the earths
Of tidings to her. She braves our presence, lo!
(Enter GWINEVER, above, with LA DAMOSEL SAUVAGE
attendant.)

Gwinever. I look down from among the clouds, so much

Joyous-Gard gives me advantage. Flattering soldier, I am young as ever, buxom in thy sight;

Is it so? Have I not been, these many years, Qualifying for the pearl-powder and tint vermeil,

The coral touch for the lips? Am I but mature,

Being Queen, and a Queen deposed? Have I not lived

Through many experiences which make woman Less sought after than wise?

MORDRED. Hazard one new

Experience; and reign with a young King.

Gwinever. Thou lack'st youth's flower of innocence, which lacked,

Youth is a name for folly.

Mordred. Thou also.

GWINEVER. A bitter wooer.

MORDRED. Embittered. I was oppressed,

Diminished and kept low. Now I am new-born,

As it were, to action; grown up in a day.

Gwinever. Thou art a madman burst from the whipping-post.

Mordred. Madman? A drunkard; pride is a new wine

Wherein I drink myself drunken. Let us be Damned notoriously, not obscurely.

GWINEVER.

Need we

Do more for that? Should we not rather, Sir, Wash and be clean? What wouldst thou have?

MORDRED.

Thyself.

GWINEVER. Incredible; a man stuffed full of shows

Cannot desire so little. Die for me, then—And I will live the merrier. What I am
Looks down on what thou art. Yet I despise
Thy mother more than thee. She, at my age,
Was trim for such a voyage as thou wouldst.

MARK (To MORDRED). Patience; we hem her in on every side.

Gwinever (To LA DAMOSEL SAUVAGE). Have I not libelled myself, setting up years

As my defenders? I am summer green Yet, my damosel, yet.

Damosel Sauvage. Thou art freshly fair; As blossoms are more than buds, excelling.

(Enter ANDRET.)

MARK. Cousin.

MORDRED. Sir Cousin Andret.

ANDRET.

Hail, leaders! King Arthur,

Spirited back from Gaul, doth raise the dust Upon the British downs.

MARK.

That is but stale.

MORDRED. As yesterday.

(Trumpets sounded and answered within.)

Andret.

These trumpets exchange neighs

Like war-horses.

(Enter Bedevere and Lucan.)

MORDRED. This is Duke Lucan and

His brother Sir Bedevere the Butler, from Arthur.

Gwinever (To the Damosel Sauvage). Enthrone

me here; I will look down on them.

DAGONET. Like Jezebel at her window.

DINADAN.

And not one

On my side there; or he would throw her down.

Lucan. To thee, Prince Mordred, and King Mark, to thee.

Our business and occasion is. We stand Commissioned not to speak on terms, but invite Your meeting with King Arthur whom ye will find Implacable only to wrong.

Bedevere. But we make plain
To thee, King Mark, Sir Mordred, unto thee,
What small security either of you
Hath of the other; each of you make use

Of the other's cause, but to advance his own. There is no love for thee, Mordred, in Mark; Nor love for Mark in Mordred; and success But sets each scrambling for the other's loss, To better himself.

Lucan. But will ye parley, Princes? Mordred. Anywhere?

BEDEVERE. Here, where in our stream of Usk These towers, wrapt round and folded by the ooze, Seem like a hill upon an isle, reflected Upside down even as King Arthur shows In Mordred's make-believe.

Mordred. Very good, then.
We are secure in arms. And in no haste;
Sith, while we speak, this castle we enclose
Consumes its victual. We will speak, and here.

(Exeunt Bedevere and Lucan.)

King Arthur fears us.

ANDRET. Gawain, first of the first, Is slain, in the King's host.

MORDRED. How knowest that?

Sir Lancelot wounded him.

ANDRET. I slew him, myself.

And yet I wept to smite him. 'Twas in the wound That Lancelot gave him in Gaul. 'Tis on report

He died well, pardoning Sir Lancelot, And asking pardon back, smitten with grief More sharp than the palpable blow of steel, with grief For the black ruin of the times, and dread Of how the heathen may prosper and thrive Upon our loss.

MARK. What terms shall we accept; What offer consider; what reject at once, If Arthur make them?

MORDRED. Let him expose how deep His dreadful opinion is of us.

DINADAN. Princes,
Nobles, fair knights without fear or reproach,
Bethink you, that we stand outside the pale,
In his regard; that truth's not truth to us,
But he can fairly break, using such law
On us, as outlaws find meted to them,
By regular citizenship.

MORDRED. What of all this?

MARK. Handle this rede for the nonce;
Be ready for deceit. When we are plucked
Closely together in our conference,
If a blade only flash, either think it
My signal that black treachery is out,
Or treachery's self slipping at unawares

Forth of its den. For a swift blade in the back,
Under the fifth rib, were a sudden seal,
Red as the plenipotentiary's wax, between
Any of us. Therefore, be ready in it;
Never caught nodding; lest we fall asleep
Everlastingly. But at sight of steel—
MORDRED. At sight of steel,
Draw, throughout the host, and fight for very life.

Andret. Are we so far? The sign may be mistook.

We rest the sport of accident, or worse, That easily might occur. So near mistrust Lurks beside danger

MORDRED.

Arthur!

MARK.

King Arthur!

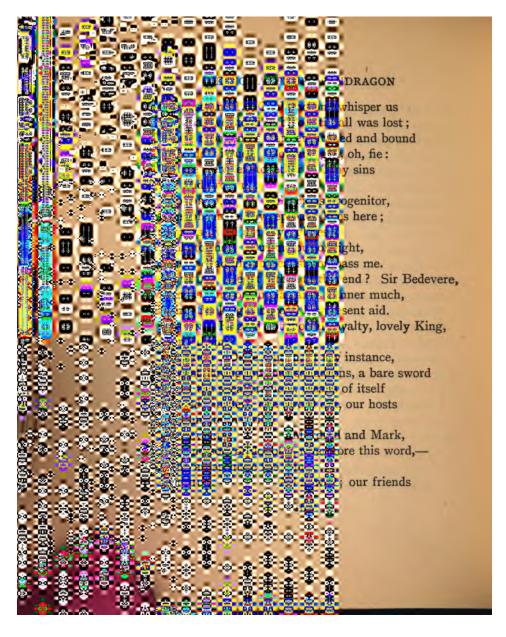
(Enter Arthur, Bedevere, Lucan and Forces.)
Arthur.
Madam,

Can we twain speak to one another? No, To no profit.

GWINEVER.

None, Sire.

ARTHUR. Mordred and Mark, Brother, and first-born son of little Margause, Let Gwinever cry, "Out on husbands!" for it; We were strangers, yet lovers, innocent, Yet sinful, ignorant, yet knowing ill,



Will look to this. Free me of my mantle's weight. So. Ease my baldrick on me. Excalibur, My sword, hangs bravely by me. If I fall In harness—I think not 'twill be to-day,— What time I fall, throw my Excalibur Into the unfathomed tarn whence, as thou heardst, Fays proffered it me. Only one blade out, mark! Display my collar; it twists.

MARK. We popinjays
Of husbands, we discarded by our spouses,
Shall we adorn ourselves? We are personage
Of much concern—to ourselves, not to our wives.

MORDRED (To ANDRET). The charge is out, that any weapon drawn

Is battle joined and closed on the instant.

ANDRET. Good.

ARTHUR. Thy revolt, unspeakable matricide; Oh, thy abominable wooing—Soft!
Recrimination, hath it no sleep,
Nepenthic lethargy, no seventh-day grace?
Is any perfect? Smooth thy drawn scowl, bent
Over those damnatory orbs; I say
Thou art my sin, and that the skies ordain
In thee a flagellant office. Lash me with
Worse than invective; ply thy thoughts which are

More cruel than scorpions, and their fruition In actions like them; plait the knotty thong Ready for my back. Would thou hadst been still-born, Abortive ere so monstrous. Lay on my stripes. Send the heavens prove more merciful than I Think thou wilt be. Must I abase myself Lower than this? My blossoms, by one graff Struck in my life, one scion, one germin, canker To lamentable illness. Pity me. But, Mordred, I yield not a barley-corn Of belted state, halve not my imperative Supremacy; no partnership hold with Cambria, nor thy derived, thy cadent force, In my divine title. Rule is of right, Unobscured by my evil. Mordred, fool, fiend, Madman, my offspring, devil, oh, what dost? DAGONET. Sirs! Sirs! Sirs! Sirs! Sirs!

An adder, crept out of this thorn-bush here, Hangeth upon my foot. I'll cut him down.

ARTHUR. What means that sword out? DAGONET. Tit for tat, my King;

I do but kill a snake that stings my heel.

(Shouts within: "A sword, a sword!" "A drawn sword, a drawn sword!")

Silence that cry! Put up that sword! ARTHUR.

MORDRED. Too late!
From hilt to point bickered that streak of light
Fatal as ever was the Fiery Cross.
I charged my men, if they but saw sword drawn,
'Twas treason planned; they to set on at once;
No further sign awaited.

ARTHUR. Word for word,

In sooth, the same did I.

DAGONET. That the King's fool

Should raise the wind so! I but spark to stubble.

ARTHUR. Ride through our hosts; undo what's done. Too late!

Our vans are met already.

MORDRED. Spur to the thickest.

ARTHUR. Rather, abide me here.

MORDRED. No private blows;

Each captain to his place; the battle joins.

My cry is "A Mordred!"

ARTHUR. "Arthur Pendragon" then!
Oh, for Sir Lancelot on this day of days!
What's sprung on us? Our dooms are traps we set
To take ourselves. Now is bed-time. Heaven help
me.

But save and except for once, only for once, I have meant nobly always.

(Exeunt All below, fighting.)
GWINEVER. Every vocable
Is speechless, language lacks words, dumb terror
Buries itself alive in a great Hush,
On this our little doomsday. Off, from the walls!
(Exit, from above, with LA DAMOSEL SAUVAGE.)

SCENE II.—BROCYLIAND. BESIDE THE LAKE.

(Enter NIMUE, MORGAN LA FAY and all the other LADIES OF THE LAKE.)

NIMUE. Soon shall Excalibur
Plunge in our dreaming mere
Where the moons come and peer
Month by month, throughout the year;
Arthur's blade; by the which means
He calls us whencesoever we are.
Tangle we glow-worms in our hair,
Elemental Queens;
Each fetch her glass and red-gold comb;
Busk, to bring King Arthur home.
MORGAN LA FAY. Over and under the foam,
Flying on dragons, we come
Each, to her tiring-room,
To fetch her glass and red-gold comb.

(Exeunt Omnes,)

(Enter MARK and ANDRET.)

Andret. My wounds gape wide, and cry my courage down.

My royal cousin, oh, convey me hence; For thou art bent to fly. Hoist me aboard; Fly with me.

MARK. I have unfurled my wings, indeed.

Andret. Mordred is broken; and his friends forget

The smiling forenoon, in this twilight grief.

MARK. King Arthur's drivers put our coveys up On every side.

ANDRET. Do not abandon me.

I wax too weak to fly or stand.

Mark.

Get help.

I am for Tintagil and the West. Good cousin, Get thyself help; and follow.

(Exit.)

ANDRET.

Curse thee, King,

For a most pitiless coward. Andret dies.

(Enter Mordred.)

I have strength left but to crawl out of sight, And bury this my fall.

(Exit.)

Mordred.

He dies, as well.

King Mordred? No, not yet; although I live, King Arthur walks above ground, equally. Armies are shed from us like wintry leaves Worn threadbare with the year. Have at him, then! I slew my mother; and it were my part To slay my father also.

(Exit.)

(Enter Bedevere.)

Bedevere. Evening falls.
The air is full of souls, the earth of dead.
The strife is fierce and indeterminate.
Never met slaughter in such pride, I think,
As now is accomplished. In most rapid haste,
This battle hath diminished either host,
With visible shrinkage. Being picked thrice over,
Winnowed, the rubbish driven forth, scores slain,
This knot of men, in concentrated ire,
Appear survivors who assimilate strength
Out of the predeceased.

(Enter Lucan.)

Brother, what is't?

Tell me, Sir Lucan. But I know too well. I see thy hand held close against thy side, To keep thy seams together; while thy spirit Will not confess how sorely thou art rent,

Sweet valiant brother. Yet, despite of wounds, Canst thou not yet one half-hour more stand up, For dear King Arthur's right?

LUCAN.

Seek we him out.

What though my coat be torn, if heart be stout?

(Enter ARTHUR.)

ARTHUR. Well met. Remorse hath wept herself to sleep,

And sees not what is done. Mordred and I, Mordred and I, Mordred and I!

(Exit.)

LUCAN.

After.

(Exit, with Bedevere.)

SCENE III .- JOYOUS-GARD. BEFORE THE CASTLE.

(Enter, above, LA DAMOSEL SAUVAGE.)

Damosel Sauvage. The death-cry of a horse is loud. The steeds go galloping, go galloping; the steeds without riders, herded together. Clods fly up from under their hoofs, over the clods of mortal men. But now, they were under the wall; now are they far away. The battle sweeps to the hills, as a cloud of rain. Who can stay it? But what now is this young knight, from the other wind, who comes running? What, sir?

(Enter LAVAIN.)

LAVAIN. Damosel, I am the youngest of Sir Lancelot's knights, Lavain. What is the hap? Sir Lancelot of the Lake is ashore in Logris. No hint of Arthur's remove came, till we found his vacant place and our fields empty. What is now befallen? Sir Lancelot, with grief of heart, returns unto his allegiance, if his allegiance will accept of him.

Damosel Sauvage. Alas! Sir Lavain, never was

greater need. But come not over-near unwarily. Even now King Arthur and Sir Mordred met between their hosts when, so far as I might see—whether it was the transmigrated Merlin from his thorn-tree, I know not, but I fear it,—there crept a viper out of a little tree, and stung Sir Dagonet, the King's fool, who must needs be by.

LAVAIN. What follows on this? Shall we come on? DAMOSEL SAUVAGE. Warily; if ye will not that matters be worse. Alas! one sword out was all swords out. All—both hosts, as one man, yet as every man, came one on another; and, no further order taken, joined most fiercely here. Hie thee, bid Sir Lancelot du Lac, if ever he will save King Arthur, save him now.

LAVAIN. He shall be here, with the speed of uttermost marching.

Damosel Sauvage. A word, a word, beware! Thrust not too suddenly upon the field; lest King Arthur and his Knights know not of Sir Lancelot, on which side he strikes; and the last misprision be worse than the first.

LAVAIN. We will use the stealth of foxes.

DAMOSEL SAUVAGE. And Sir Lancelot of the Lake, Sir—

LAVAIN. I hear: what more?

DAMOSEL SAUVAGE. Queen Gwinever is within these walls.

LAVAIN. Why should she be here?

Damosel Sauvage. Anon we will speak of that. I have a deeming, Sir, when she knows Sir Lancelot is near by, she will meet him without, here on the road, by the postern gate.

LAVAIN. Sir Lancelot will I make understand this. Damosel Sauvage. Be secret; walk with care.

(Exit.)

LAVAIN. I will be swifter than green youth; discreeter than white eld.

(Exit.)

(Enter Bedevere.)

BEDEVERE. Arthur, Arthur! where shall we look for thee? The lore of Merlin becometh as childishness. When we are asked, what shall we make answer, concerning these things?

(Exit.)

(Enter, below, GWINEVER and LA DAMOSEL SAUVAGE.)
GWINEVER. Turrets and oriels of Camelot,
And thou, dolorous Joyous-Gard, make nests
For owls; Arthur, Gwinever and Lancelot
Know you no more. There dwells an old recluse,

Near to Stonehenge which Merlin in his craft Conjured from green Ierne, circling wide, Like dancing giants of a pitchy night.

Damosel Sauvage. I know of the holy woman; by a cross,

The limbs girt with a nimbus, like a wheel, As the manner is, she lives beside a well, And fasts and prays and can work miracles.

GWINEVER. To her I'll make repair; and will lay

Majesty and vanity together.

DAMOSEL SAUVAGE. Even on thy word, I catch the muffled tread

And tramp of steeds; or greatly I misdeem.

GWINEVER. Listen, as if for oracles.

Damosel Sauvage. I hear,

I hear!

GWINEVER. What dost thou hear? Lay ear to the ground.

March, march, march! Were it from the hosts, It came the other way. That banner is his.

LANCELOT (Within). Dismount!

GWINEVER. Lion-voiced, and mine own,

(Enter Lancelot, Bors, Urre, Lavain and Forces; with them Bedevere.)

LANCELOT. I kiss

Thy garment-hem, immortal loveliness.

GWINEVER. Why not my lips? Why, clip me merrily,

Knight. There are acts we predicate as done By certain men, their greatness being as Our surety they will so act.

LANCELOT. Come to the point.

GWINEVER. We have trifled over long, thou wouldst say; which

Steals our time from us.

LANCELOT. Is it a trifle that I

Am in forbidden Logris?

Gwinever. How art addressed

In it? Wilt fall upon King Arthur now;

Or on Mordred? Yonder knight was with the King; Yon knight.

LANCELOT. This is the bold Sir Bedevere

Who joined my company, and had just struck

Mine ears with what thine ears must sorrow over,

When we attained your gate. Take up the tale;

(To Bedevere) And of King Arthur let us know the worst.

For bad it is, my Queen.

GWINEVER. We are children

Eager to hear, unto the "ever after."

Bedevere. Ye know of the beginning. From Camelot.

The battle rolled away; until we fought,
Led by what bale-fire, by what influence,
What necromantic beckonings? But we fought
Round Merlin's thorn, where tops and tors look on
The landslips of Brocyliand, leaning
Upon the Holy Lake.

GWINEVER and LANCELOT. In the Waste Lands. BEDEVERE. The Lake of the Waste Lands. There, at Compline,

King Arthur, and my brother, Duke Lucan, And I stood sole. The hosts, death interchanged Mutually, like a peaceful churchyard made it, Each man stretched out for his own monument.

Lancelot. No cenotaphs, but real deaths. Bedevere. Counted I

Only ourselves? Soon we were ware, in the red And stormy sunset of that fairyland Whose every cave hath been some dragon's den, Where Mordred leaned upon his sword, among The fallen standing. Him King Arthur marked, And gat a spear out of Sir Lucan's hand. "Betide me life, betide me death," quoth he:

Yea, ere we formed a prayer he should not go, Or bade him tempt not fortune that placed us, Though shrunken, in better number, since we stood Upon the field several to one, he ran, Two hands grasping his lance, on Mordred's guard, Whom coming, Mordred, not to be backward, Fell upon grimly. King Arthur found him, With a foin of the lance, below the shield Wherewith Mordred had hopes to cover up His blackness. But—oh, that I must add but! But—like a hair in the mouth among choice viands, But, that abhorred but, that renegade Which drags at the tail of success, and is in face Envy, that back-biter, that parasite, That but, that little word which qualifies Comes now. When Mordred felt he had gotten His death-wound, he flung himself, all his weight Thrusting his body on the tree, forward More than a fathom to the burr, to reach King Arthur, whom he smote upon the skull, Through helmet, coif of mail, and all; which done, Transfixt as I have said, falling in his tracks, Mordred lay stark dead; while King Arthur swooned And swooned again, so perilous a stroke Gave that two-handed sword.

Lancelot. Thou art surcharged With wounds and bitter sorrow.

GWINEVER. No less, haste;
And put the matter of thy thoughts in frame.
Have none of ye no wine here, to moisten his lips?
Bedevere. Queen Gwinever, words fail me for the end;

Words and not strength. My mind discredits half Of what I truly saw. More dead than alive, There Arthur lay, massy in shining steel, Imploring haste, that we should carry him Unto the water-side.

GWINEVER. Most certainly

It would be his desire. I know his thought.

Bedevere. Merlin's thorn-tree, aslant, overhung where

The waters of the lake, under their crags,
Swam like a midland sea; while Arthur, beneath
The night-shade branches, on gray lichen, moss,
And the purple bells of the heather, couched, almost
Passed from our sphere; whom Lucan and myself
Up-heaved between us, and would have upheld.
But Lucan's wounds, he burdened and enforced,
Brake open; so that he sank down and died
Under King Arthur's weight. Arthur shed tears,

To see life given in service; then, as opening
The door of his heart, spake faintly—shall I say on?
GWINEVER. Word for word as he spake, give word
for word.

BEDEVERE. Thus then,—so he began—and with the words

Pity and hope were blent as one should find Solace believing them! "Sinners," he said, "Sinners pitchy as we are saints in heaven, Bid remember my fallen Queen." His breath Almost evaporating into space, He closed with this; but, in a little while, Lisping small, charged me unclasp Excalibur, His regal falchion, from his thigh; weakness, Strengthened in tyranny, forbidding him So much as to move.

GWINEVER. What of Excalibur?
BEDEVERE. He bade me fling
Excalibur into the liquid midst
Of the elemental lake, drowning it there.

GWINEVER. Arthur and Merlin, sailing once, received

Excalibur out of the depths, with warning That, in jeopardy, it should be given back To Nimue and her sisters magical,

Who walk those haunted broads.

LANCELOT. What came of this?

GWINEVER. Nimue should have risen.

Bedevere. Down where the marginal pebbles were wet,

Down, till the level lake spread from my feet,
I gat me forth from Arthur. Pummel and heft
And damascened blade I prepared to fling;
But damascened blade, pummel and heft
Parcelled the after-glow and bluish moon,
Then changing guard in the sky, so that one half
From fifty facets flashed rose-colour, the other
Like diamond; till the glory of it seduced
My fancy; for ye know the handicraft
Of Arthur's sword of what glory it was.

Lancelor. Even in the prosaic every-day It had virtue.

BEDEVERE. Must I accuse myself?
Lightly I hid it, for the Kings to come
In Logris after; and made quick return
To Arthur where he lay. Whose eager word
Asked me what answer came out of the Lake.
All my message was nought; what could I more?
I saw nothing but wind and water. He
Whispered, "Thou hast told me thy first lie. Go back

And do better." But the precious stones, in the moon

Now sole and silent hermit of the night,
Amazed me yet again. I thrust the sword
Under the bracken, and gat me to the King
Who craved the Lake's answer, "How spake the
Lake?"

"I heard the water wap and the wind waun," Nothing more could I say. Then Arthur rose In his exceeding sickness, and exclaimed, "Traitor, thou'dst have me dead, for the vile gauds And tinsel of the hilt. Do me this good, Or ever my wound take cold. It is too long I tarry here already. Were I whole, My hand were heavy on thee. Shall I die With the weight of a curse upon thee?" I fled Straightway; and, over my shoulder turning My too desirous eyes, wrapt round the hilt The starry baldrick, and, footing the verge Of land and water, hurled Excalibur, With all my might and skill of throwing, that The brand sang like a bird of the air, and spun Far out over the flood. At once—it is Likest the telling of another's tale, So much I doubt the witness of mine eyes,—

May be, the ń I saw, disencumbered ered, "Haste," ais clasped hands he King like t, eathless, hove do and thwarts atcry of shrieks n hree Queens,

Those same who stood around about the throne At Arthur's crowning—

GWINEVER. I remember them.

BEDEVERE. And Nimue, the Lady of the Lake, Stretched out their hands for Arthur, whom they drew

Into the ship from me, kissing him oft,
And called him brother; then, nursing their crowns,
Sat down beside him; while the keel, not furrowing
The water that it ploughed, drew swiftly off—
He lying with his head in Nimue's lap,
Under the poop.

GWINEVER. Thou settedst never a foot Aboard of her?

Bedevere. I kept my feet. Incense
Arose in clouds out of the hold. Always
The Ladies, round the cabin, shrieked and wailed
Ever. I have watched the lark on heaven's stairs
Mount, till the bird became a speck, the speck
Music alone, then nothing; so the lament
Departed, while I watched the ship lessen
By less to less than nothing, drawing away.
I have not ate nor drank, nor yet sat down
Afterwards, but have found you.

GWINEVER. True servitor.

and good ease. rs, Urre, Lavain ar ath ceased strave embarking w, free

As youth and virginity, we entreat A holy man to make us one body In matrimony.

GWINEVER. Thou wouldst leap in the dark. Fools that we are, from the first night to our last, King Arthur's hand would draw the bed curtain, And make our loves ashamed. That's not to be Thought of.

LANCELOT. I would dare it.

GWINEVER. Fools that we are; Whither hath daring brought us? To the abysm. We should have met earlier or never.

LANCELOT. Heaven shield I had not met thee! Sit with me,

To rule Armorica and add Logris.

GWINEVER. Two fair realms.

I will not reign over them. But thy scarred And weathered comeliness wouldst lay here, Sir? Arthur hath pillowed here his benign curls Thousands of times; and I have pastured me On his neck, since my sire, one Whitsuntide, Gave me away; before thy countenance was Graven on mine.

Lancelot. Lady, I have been through The infernal regions of madness; and on



Braiding my hair, perchance curling thy beard About my fingers, with such wantonness As flouts the sickening lapse; there let the flood Flow round our bosoms to our throats, we setting Our faces seaward, while we drink to each other The salt pledge of that wassail, till the foam Upon our heads wreathe chaplets, and submerge Us in the sparkling water.

LANCELOT. World-weary

We both are. If thy constancy be level

With the inception of the deed, we'll do it.

GWINEVER. Myself was silent till I was resolved.

LANCELOT. Since it is madness that we live together,

The saner madness is we die together.

By formal testament, I will bequeath

The powers I have afoot.

GWINEVER. With brevity

Let it be done.

Lancelot. Sir Bors, and the host!
(Re-enter Bors, Urre, Lavain and Forces.)

Lavain,

Thy sister Elain of Astolat died for love.

LAVAIN. Why doth my Lord call this to mind to-day?

LANCELOT. I think of it to-day.

Bors. There is imminent news

To hand, whose speech were gall to my lady.

GWINEVER. King Arthur's downfall; we have heard of that.

Bors. The White Horse and the Raven, with their King,

Outlandish Cedric whose barbarities Appal the hearing, have possessed themselves, I mean, of the plenitude of Albion, Upon that downfall.

LAVAIN. Yet have we swords and lives.

LANCELOT. This is my charge. Go, good Sir Bors de Ganis.

With gentle Urre, to Armorica. The rest, Throw yourselves into Cornwall, Wales and Cumber-

And call on Constantine, who is renowned,
To be the British King, as we forecast
Against the extremity. Myself am vowed
To secret pilgrimage at Saint Michael's Mount
By Marazion, with our Lady Queen.
The scope of all I have ordained, ye know.
Embrace your welfare all.

GWINEVER. Salute my fingers,

land;

And bestow solitude on us. Kiss my hand.

LANCELOT. We'll shut our souls' windows, made fast until

Eternity shall crack the ribs of death.

Some say the ninth wave, some the seventh swells Bigger than those between. I have been mad At divers times, but I am not mad now.

URRE. What means your worshipful honour? LAVAIN. Thy will is our law,

To the last article.

GWINEVER. O my Lord, my Lord!

LANCELOT. I have always known the sea is full of water.

How wet and cold it is. Now that all fish, Sprats and leviathans, are laid to the heart, Shall we not shiver? Why will ye shower me With bucketsful of gudgeons?

Bors. He is mad as the moon.

URRE. Trust not thyself alone with him.

GWINEVER. What fear?

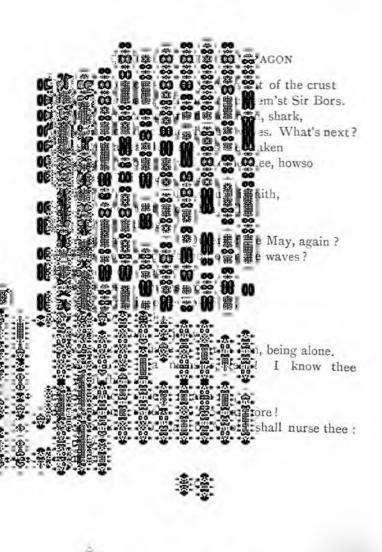
I am arch-victress on him, in these moods.

Lancelot. Ye wear the favour of familiar friends.

I am not so deceived. How their gills work!

Tom Thumb was dished up in a sturgeon's paunch.

That is a sturgeon there. Thou art a crab



· 🐺 •

Lancelot. With a woman to drown as well.
Our linen craves airing; it hath been damp
Almost since the first Sabbath. To the shore!
Ye would have me disbelieve my eyes. To the shore,
To the sea-shore!

GWINEVER. Thither? For very fear Of what is to happen—

Lancelot. Merlin was much to blame To live so long, and grow so old. The shore, Where we will cast up sums; to the sea-shore, The shore, to the shore!

GWINEVER. And our experiment.

(Exeunt Lancelot and Gwinever.)

Bors. This is the old distemperature.

URRE. The Queen

Lives in his peril, by her own command. There is none other but obedience, And prayers for the subsidence of the storm We cannot force to abate.

LAVAIN. Both are possessed. The crown must now devise on Constantine,

As he spake orderly.

.*

Bors. We will wend our ways.

Farewell, dear noble uncle, noblest man.

(Exit, with URRE and part of the Forces.)

LAVAIN. Your charges I have jealously in mind, Madam and Lord. Ye chevaliers who rode
So well with Lancelot, ride with me along
To Cambria. Irreparably is past
The sway of British princes from this land.
Ride, remant, ride; or Merlin changeth us.
I feel the enchanter Merlin on the wind.
The Ladies of the Lake press close behind.

(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE IV.—THE ISLE OF AVILLON.

(Enter, with ARTHUR borne along, NIMUE, MORGAN LA FAY and all the other LADIES OF THE LAKE.)

QUEEN OF NORTH GALES. Lancelot and Gwinever, Sunken on a coral bier,

For ever and for ever more,

Side by side,

Beneath the tide,

Are washed a bow-shot from the shore.

QUEEN OF THE WASTE LANDS. Merlin's feet are stocked in boots

Down among the sodden roots.

Above, he playeth at " Jack i' the Green."

Every gust

Abide he must.

The Lady Nimue, she is our Queen.

Morgan La Fay. Mordred lieth in the dew

Of Brocyliand, stricken through.

Dearest brother whom we carry,

Live in shadows, Mid these meadows; For thou art away in faery.

QUEEN OF NORTH GALES. Taunt him not!

QUEEN OF THE WASTE LANDS. Trouble him not!

MORGAN LA FAY. Revile him not!

NIMUE. Reproach him not at all. He wakes and stares.

stares.

Life, death and we are nought, and everything; Priceless and valueless; but measurable Against ourselves.

ARTHUR.

Dear sisters.

NIMUE.

He calls to us.

ARTHUR. Why have ye towed me through this wondrous place?

What tomb, what couch is this? Or is't a ship That, like the crescent moon, sails in the æther Too high to dread a fall? My limbs wax light, Beyond mortality's warrant. And your faces, Like meteors out of their profound lair Immergent on me, presage much, and fill The haunted chamber of my brain.

Nimue.

Waft him,

As erewhile with our oars, now with our words, Unto repose in Avillon.

ARTHUR. Repose? More than the common somnolence that drugs Nightly our weariness?

QUEEN OF THE WASTE LANDS. In Avillon, Mid marish, lake and river, Avillon, Avillon in the Waste Lands, Avillon Where the winds drop into the arms of the clouds, Snow melts for pity of flowers, underfoot Blossoms the sedgy iris, overhead Hang red-gold pippins, the great dragon-flies Floating twixt green-sward and green boughs. ARTHUR. I see

Fruit, flowers and dragon-flies, even as thou say'st. QUEEN OF THE WASTE LANDS. Thy bed, For counterpane, shall have fine spider-work,

With many a beaded dewdrop spangled over; The busy weavers setting up their looms, Throwing their shuttles overthwart thy face, Without thy knowledge of them.

Avillon is ARTHUR.

About me. To hold acquaintance with nothing? Cut short thy words. How long to sleep? For aye? Morgan La Fay. Thou shalt rule again.

QUEEN OF NORTH GALES. Healing, thou shalt wax

Whole of thy wound whose unscarred closing shall

Conclude thy change; thy nails shall grow no whit; Nor newly furrowed wrinkle seam thy skin; Nor years sallow thy cheek, hollow thine eyes With trenched circles round their orbits drawn; Nor do time's office on thee.

MORGAN LA FAY. Thou'lt start up In the fulness of time, in the twinkling of an eye, Veritable Pendragon!

Nimue, the Queens and all the Ladies. Pendragon!

QUEEN OF NORTH GALES. There shall be space For much before and after.

ARTHUR. To rule again,
With wisdom for my folly? And with power
For frailty? Even in the might of Love,
And in the majesty of it? I am a man,
Dear to my thoughts, and capable of good,
In spite of all my failure.

NIMUE. Lift the dead man.

ARTHUR. Then am I dead? Ye are my pallbearers

And my chief mourners. Wonderful Presences, Tell me what I am hereafter; what are ye?

1st Lady. Dreams.

2nd LADY. Echoes of thy thought.

3rd LADY.

Nothing.
Memory.

4th LADY.

5th Lady. The shadow of thyself.

QUEEN OF NORTH GALES. Thy history.

QUEEN OF THE WASTE LANDS. All we are all these.

MORGAN LA FAY. Not ourselves,

But others' guesses of us.

ARTHUR.

Ye tell me, in fine,

I am an elfin King, mid elves?

Ye throw dust in men's eyes.

NIMUE.

Gold-dust in thine,

Preserving thee as flies in golden amber,

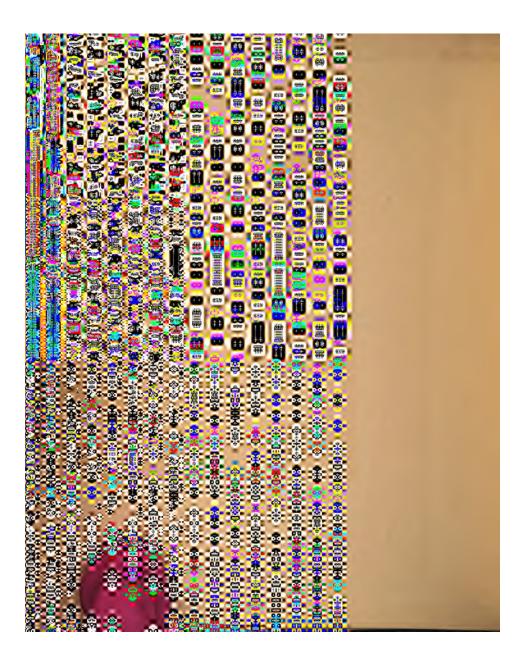
So thee in slumber.

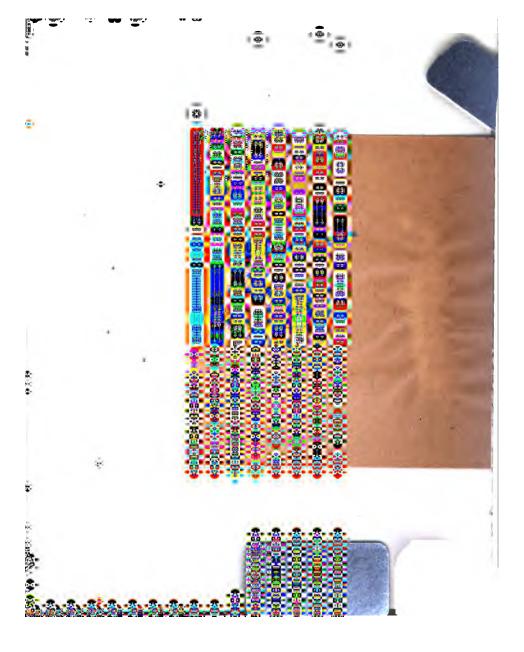
(ARTHUR falls asleep and is borne out.

Exeunt Omnes.)

LONDON:

PRINTED BY GILBERT AND RIVINGTON LD. ST. JOHN'S HOUSE, CLERKENWELL, E.C. .





Lancelot. I think of it to-day.

Bors. There is imminent news

To hand, whose speech were gall to my lady.

GWINEVER. King Arthur's downfall; we have heard of that.

Bors. The White Horse and the Raven, with their King,

Outlandish Cedric whose barbarities

Appal the hearing, have possessed themselves,

I mean, of the plenitude of Albion,

Upon that downfall.

LAVAIN. Yet have we swords and lives.

Lancelot. This is my charge. Go, good Sir Bors de Ganis,

With gentle Urre, to Armorica. The rest,

Throw yourselves into Cornwall, Wales and Cumberland:

And call on Constantine, who is renowned,
To be the British King, as we forecast
Against the extremity. Myself am vowed
To secret pilgrimage at Saint Michael's Mount
By Marazion, with our Lady Queen.

The scope of all I have ordained, ye know.

Embrace your welfare all.

GWINEVER. Salute my fingers,